

THE THEATRE;

ADDRESSED TO

YOUNG MEN.



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THE THEATRE:

ITS PERNICIOUS TENDENCY.

ADDRESSED TO YOUNG MEN.

"BE NOT DECEIVED: EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD MANNERS."

BY

WILLIAM KEDDIE.

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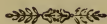
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P R E F A C E .



THE following Essay is published in the hope of providing young men with an antidote to the seductive influences with which they are plied in certain quarters, under the specious guise of dramatic reform, for the purpose of inducing them to frequent the theatre. The writer has been at pains to enrich his pages with the opinions of eminent authors, both friendly and adverse to histrionic entertainments, as to the demoralizing tendency of the stage. Indeed, nothing but the importance which he attaches to the testimonies quoted from the writings of Dr. Witherspoon, Dr. Andrew Thomson, Mr. J. Angell James, Mr. Todd of Philadelphia, Mr. Macaulay, Sir Archibald

Alison, Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. Thomas Carlyle, the late Mr. Montague Stanley, and others, would have led to the appearance of this little volume, which owes any value it possesses to its containing an epitome of weighty authorities against the theatre.



SOURCES OF RATIONAL AND INNOCENT ENJOYMENT.



To join advantage to amusement, to gather profit with pleasure,
Is the wise man's necessary aim, when he lieth in the shade of recreation;
Few, but full of understanding, are the books of the library of God,
And fitting for all seasons are the gain and the gladness they bestow.
The volume of mystery and Grace, for the hour of deep communings,
When the soul considereth intensely the startling marvel of itself:
The book of destiny and Providence, for the time of sober study,
When the mind gleaneth wisdom from the olive grove of history;
And the cheerful pages of Nature, to gladden the pleasant holiday,
When the task of duty is complete, and the heart swelleth high with satisfaction.

That which may profit and amuse is gathered from the volume of creation.
The cheapest pleasures are the best; and nothing is more costly than sin.

TUPPER'S Proverbial Philosophy.



GOD made all his creatures to be happy. When he looked upon the finished works of creation, He pronounced them to be "very good;" and happiness was the consequence of goodness. If we inquire into the nature of the lower animals, we discover that enjoyment is the result of the suitableness of their organization to the condi-

tions in which they are placed. This holds true of the minutest and meanest animalculæ revealed to sight by the microscope; and the capacities and means of enjoyment are observed to increase the higher we rise in the scale of organized being. The principle of goodness or benevolence, which reigns without an exception throughout the realms of animated nature, attains its highest manifestation in the structure, the functions, and the external conditions of man; to whose use and enjoyment, as the last and best of the works of God upon earth, all the kingdoms of nature have been subordinated. Created in the image of his Maker, and endowed with faculties of thought and feeling, qualifying him, in his pristine state, for holding high communion with God, the spirit of man, immortal, though fallen, still bears uneffaced the impress of his heavenly original, in his faculties of observation and reflection, and his exquisite susceptibilities of emotion and affection. In the rightly-directed exercise of his mental powers, in the regulated indulgence of his affections, and in the discipline and control of his passions, according to the infallible standard of Divine truth, the Creator has ordained that man's purest enjoyment in this life shall consist;—whilst that which constitutes his truest happi-

ness here, is also the means of his preparation for the future condition of his being, when disenthralled from the bondage of ignorance and sin, and re-created after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness—with all the faculties of his soul elevated, expanded, purified—his spirit shall attain to the perfection of his existence, and his happiness shall be as boundless as his duration. In order to form an estimate of his capacities and means of enjoyment, look at man, even in this the infancy and imperfection of his being. He is placed in a world which, if its structure and arrangements were not all contrived with a special and exclusive regard to his welfare, is not the less suitable to his wants, and conducive to his pleasures. He is endowed with senses, fitting him to maintain intercourse and communion with the outer world. Through these channels his mind is stored with the materials of improving thought, and his heart receives the most grateful impressions. The eye which conveys to him the intimations of visible things, and directs him through the daily routine of useful occupation, is capable of being trained to the perception and appreciation of beauty of form and diversity of colour. The ear conveys information to him in the accents of articulate

speech ; and its mysterious cavities vibrate to melodious successions of sweet sounds,—

“Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony.”

From these, and the other senses, the mind is supplied with those informations, upon which the judgment and the imagination are exercised ; and the exercise is itself a source of refined and exalted pleasure. It thus appears that God has endowed us with faculties of body and mind susceptible of the highest enjoyment, and surrounded us with means and opportunities for the moderate and pleasurable use of them. It would not have been consistent with the Divine benevolence to have conferred these faculties on his rational creatures, without at the same time bestowing upon them the means of their gratification ; nor, on the other hand, would it have been in accordance with the wise economy of creation to have furnished the world which we inhabit with the materials of earthly happiness, without also giving us the capacities for enjoying them. Creative skill has filled the world with objects to be studied and admired for their infinite contrivance and design. Creative beneficence has lavished upon us means of delight, fitted to our nature as moral, intellec-

tual, and sensitive beings. To be happy is our privilege and our duty. To neglect the innocent pleasures which God has scattered around us in bountiful profusion, is to treat his goodness with ingratitude and contempt. To abuse them, is to turn the common blessings of Providence into instruments of rebellion against the Giver of every good and perfect gift. To use them aright, is to guard against their usurping the place in our affections that is due to God alone—to “use the world as not abusing it,” seeing that “the fashion thereof passeth away.”

The materials of human happiness, at least as large a share of them as it would be safe to trust us with on this side of eternity, are within the reach of all of us, to a far greater extent than we are willing to acknowledge. Notwithstanding all the imperfections of our lapsed and fallen world, there are boundless resources of moral and intellectual gratification left to us, from which we are only excluded by our own innate perversity. But in order to enjoy them, we must cultivate simple tastes, and cherish pure affections, and be content

“To drink with gratitude the crystal stream
Of unreprieved enjoyment;”—

and so our pleasures and amusements will leave

no aching void in the heart, and bring no compunctious visitings to the conscience ; they will be taken up to refresh the mind in the intervals of employment, and laid down again, without regret, when we bend our attention anew to the sober realities of life.

Such pleasures are accessible to us, whatever place we may occupy in the social scale ; and the more simple, natural, improving, and beneficent they are in their own nature, the less will our enjoyment be contingent on external circumstances. The further we recede from the artificial, unwholesome, and seductive gratifications of man's contrivance, and yield to the loftier impulses of our moral and intellectual being, the nearer we approach to the sources of true and lasting happiness. One of the most thoughtful and sympathetic of our poets discourses thus on the equality of our means of enjoyment :—

—“The sun is fixed,
And the infinite magnificence of heaven
Fixed, within reach of every human eye ;
The sleepless ocean murmurs for all ears ;
The vernal field infuses fresh delight
Into all hearts. Throughout the world of sense,
Even as an object is sublime or fair,
That object is laid open to the view
Without reserve or veil ; and as a power
Is salutary, or an influence sweet,

Are each and all enabled to perceive
That power, that influence, by impartial law.

* * * * *

The primal duties shine aloft—like stars ;
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Are scattered at the feet of Man—like flowers.
The generous inclination, the just rule,
Kind wishes, and good actions, and pure thoughts—
No mystery is here ! Here is no boon
For high, yet not for low ; for proudly graced—
Yet not for meek of heart. The smoke ascends
To heaven as lightly from the cottage hearth
As from the haughtiest palace. He, whose soul
Ponders this true equality, may walk
The fields of earth with gratitude and hope.” *

These general observations are intended to guard the object of the following pages from prejudice and misconception. The writer is well aware, that in stigmatising theatrical amusements, as immoral in their tendency, he is exposing himself to the charge of being narrow-minded, illiberal, and austere. He is not careful to defend himself from hard words. Strike ! but hear. He owns, however, that he feels particularly anxious at the outset that he may not be considered as inimical to harmless amusements. Addressing himself primarily to young men, he would express a decided preference for recreation in the form of some useful

study in literature, science, or art, thus combining rational amusement with self-cultivation. It is a fine remark of Sir John Herschell's—"Every young man should have a pursuit; a useful one, if possible, but at all events an innocent one." Private and systematic study in the leisure of the evening is not incompatible with laborious and engrossing occupation throughout the day, and in most cases will serve all the purposes of recreation. The alternation of study with work affords an agreeable relief to the mind, to which it restores vigour and animation, and prevents it from sinking into lassitude or idle repose. But in order to be useful, the study must be systematic; for nothing is less instructive and improving than irregular and unconnected mental efforts, to whatever subject directed. That which is worth doing at all, is worth doing well. The temptation of our time is light and desultory reading. Our literature is dwindling down into reviews, and magazines, and newspapers; things that people can read while they are whirled along in railways, as if the railroad were the royal road to knowledge. Our habits of reflection are becoming as rapid as our locomotion, and the literature of the rail symbolises the intellectual characteristics of the age. Su-

perfcial reading produces superficial thinking. Men are content to acquire their knowledge at the smallest possible expenditure of time and labour ; and the worst feature of all, because the most hopeless, is that they *are* content. Popular literature, popular science, and philosophy “for the million,” are well enough in their place ; but what they are gaining in diffusiveness, they are losing in depth. That which the men of a former generation acquired by toiling through massive volumes, the smatterers of our day are satisfied with obtaining in penny pamphlets. But it is nevertheless true that toil is the condition of acquiring even a moderate share of accurate information ; and if any young man is so fanciful as to suppose that knowledge worth being possessed, is to be obtained without labour, and hard labour too, he will find himself at last in the predicament of those who, in the insane paroxysms of mercantile speculation, resign themselves to the idle and mischievous hope of making money without working for it. The young man who would shun the self-deception and avoid the certain disappointment of such a course, should give himself to the reading of BOOKS. Magazines and pamphlets will occupy their appropriate place, when perused by him as a literary pastime,

in which he unbends his mind from severer studies, and from which he can turn without reluctance to the productions of the earnest thinkers and solid writers who still illumine the path of knowledge, and more especially to the works of the great intellects of former times. Let him choose friends amongst books; they will never fail him in the time of perplexity and distress. It is one of the prerogatives of a taste for useful and improving literature, that a sympathy grows up betwixt the reader and a favourite author, by which he is enabled to hold communion with the illustrious of every age; and the companionship elevates his thoughts, his feelings, and his self-respect.

Perhaps many self-improving young men will, in the first instance, prefer science to literature. Be it so; the study of science will, in due time, bring the love of literature in its train; for every science has its own literature, and some of the most eloquent and pleasing, not to say poetical productions of the day, belong to the literature of science. The age is scientific. Its greatest discoveries—its most useful improvements—the development and application of its material resources—the principles of its arts and manufactures—its facilities of transit and travel—its marvellous methods of commu-

nication, literally “annihilating space and time,” are all based upon science; and undoubtedly that man’s education falls short of fulfilling one of the prime obligations of the age, which leaves him ignorant of the principles involved in these improvements. Besides, it does seem incongruous that an inquiring mind should be satisfied to remain unacquainted with the constitution of the material tenement which it inhabits, so “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and challenging investigation, both as a department of our self-knowledge—“the proper study of mankind is man”—and with a view to the physical training and treatment of an organism so delicately strung, and so liable to go out of tune. The science of chemistry presents another attractive subject of inquiry,—teaching us in one of its departments that Infinite Wisdom has impressed the ultimate particles of matter, weighing less than the millionth part of an atom of dust, with laws so exact as to give something like a literal significance to the declaration of the inspired writer, that the Creator “comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance”—whilst from another department we learn that the elementary substances with which we become familiar in the mineral king-

dom, contribute, under new modifications, to the support and nourishment of plants; and these, in their turn, are made to minister to the sustenance of animals. Still further, the investigations of the chemist demonstrate, that of fifty-five so-called elementary bodies, presented to us by nature, only four are employed in elaborating the mysterious creations of living matter; thus showing how the Almighty can work by few as well as by many agencies, and that his greatest operations are conducted by means of the simplest instruments. Or, once more, how many charming and instructive objects of study are offered to the inquirer in the science of astronomy, penetrating the amplitudes of space, telling the number of the stars, and calling them by their names; or in geology, occupied with the structure and early conditions of the globe which we inhabit; and in the kindred sciences of botany and zoology, describing the plants and animals which are contemporary with man upon the surface of the earth, and carrying us back to strange forms of animal and vegetable life, which existed in the successive eras preceding the appearance of the human race. For these and other means of rational recreation and mental improvement, there are abundant facilities provided even for

the working-classes, in cheap books and accessible lecture-rooms. The excessive prolongation of the hours of labour is indeed a sad obstacle to self-improvement amongst the population of a manufacturing city. But those who have the most time at their command do not always make the best use of it; and the young man who resolves to save and improve the fragments of time, will, in the long-run, find himself not far behind men of greater leisure. Long hours do not preclude opportunities for frivolous amusement. The hardest worker can equally find time for self-improvement if he has the will. The old proverb says—"Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." In like manner, economise the minutes, and the hours will take care of themselves.

"Small sands the mountain, moments make the year."

"If it is asked (said Dr. Channing, in an address to a mechanics' institute), how can the labouring man find time for self-culture? I answer, that an earnest purpose finds time, or makes time. A man who follows his calling with industry and spirit, and uses his earnings economically, will always have some portions of the day at command. And it is astonishing

how fruitful of improvement a short season becomes, when eagerly seized and faithfully used. A single hour in the day, steadily given to the study of some interesting subject, brings unexpected accumulations of knowledge." In the same spirit was the resolution of the ancient painter—"No day without a line." And to cite one other authority, that of Dr. Olinthus Gregory, who says—"With a few exceptions (so few indeed, that they need scarcely be taken into a practical estimate), any person may learn anything upon which he sets his heart. To insure success, he has simply so to discipline his mind as to check its vagrancies, to cure it of its constant proneness to be doing two or more things at a time, and to compel it to direct its combined energies simultaneously to a single object, and thus to do one thing at once. This I consider as one of the most difficult, but one of the most useful, lessons that a young man can learn." The youth who is alive to the importance of self-education, and seizes every opportunity of prosecuting it, is independent of frivolous amusements. The pursuit of knowledge, with its pleasant toils and grateful rewards, will leave him neither time nor inclination for them; and he will derive fresh incentives to effort from the invit-

ing fields of inquiry constantly opening up before him, from the shortness of the period allotted for their cultivation, and the urgent calls of active duty and social usefulness addressed to him by the momentous age in which we live.

But whilst recommending intellectual pursuits and amusements to youth, we admit the necessity for occasional relaxation, in the form of mere recreation or diversion. The bow will lose its tension if kept constantly on the strain. All that we contend for is, that the amusement shall still be innocent. The paucity in our large towns of popular entertainments of an unobjectionable description, is certainly to be regretted. It is not enough to suppress such corrupting haunts as the cheap theatres, or to discourage attendance on those where vice and folly are presented in a guise suitable to the tastes of their more refined frequenters. There is a felt and acknowledged want of a class of pure and elevating popular amusements; and although this is no excuse in the meantime for tolerating or countenancing those of a pernicious description, it affords a strong reason why efforts should be employed to put entertainments of at least a harmless nature in their place. The growing taste and avidity for exhibitions of paintings and sculpture, and of objects of

natural history, point in a direction from which substantial improvements in the habits of the people might be expected, were our museums, botanic gardens, and picture galleries thrown open on accessible terms, and some pains taken by the friends of the working-classes to render them instructive and inviting. Properly regulated entertainments of music of the higher class might also conduce to refine the tastes and manners of the people, and withdraw them from pursuits of a debasing tendency. But the most desirable improvement of all, is one which must be left to the slow and silent influence of education. It is that which will render home the centre of attraction, and train even the common people to tastes and habits which may be gratified at their own firesides, and in the bosom of their families, without either the desire or necessity for seeking their pleasures in great public assemblies. We would earnestly counsel the youthful reader to cultivate assiduously home habits and home affections. If he is removed, as many young men in our great cities are, from the parental roof, let him people the solitude of his lodgings by making companions of his books; and when he invites the intercourse of friends, let them be "few and well chosen." It is at home we must study

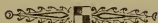
the principles of action which we reduce to practice in the business of life. It is in the privacy of home that we receive our daily portion of the bread of life, to fit us for daily toil and temptation ; and the " closet " is pre-eminently the place where man enjoys his most exalted privilege on earth, that of holding communion with his Maker. It is there where the youth must first acquire the habit of controlling his passions and directing the processes of his mind ; and learn to " keep his heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life "—" out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." It is in the retirement of home that we are in the most advantageous circumstances for reading and reflection ; and the love of knowledge there cultivated for its own sake, is a far more wholesome incitement to mental exertion and self-denial, than the love of approbation, or the desire of fame, which the poet affirms to be—

"The spur that the clear spirit doth raise
To scorn delights and live laborious days."

The best and greatest of men have acknowledged their obligations to the moral influences of home for all their public usefulness. It was a fine feature in the character of the late Sir

Thomas Fowell Buxton, whose memoirs are replete with valuable lessons to young men, that his natural robustness of mind was tempered with a manly tenderness, derived from the affections of home ; and that although it was his “the applause of listening senates to command,” he ever found the strongest encouragement to the faithful and fearless discharge of public duty—next to the favour of God and the approbation of conscience—in the love which cheered him on in the domestic circle. There is no love so unselfish,—no sympathy so true,—no human approval so grateful and encouraging, as the love, and the sympathy, and the approbation of home. Let home be the scene of our pleasures and the sanctuary of our hearts. Amidst its calm seclusion from a jarring world,—its “intimate delights,” “fire-side enjoyments,” and “homeborn happiness,”—let us quietly prosecute our self-improvement, preparing ourselves for usefulness in this life, and for the moral and spiritual activities of the life that is to come ; and it will add a charm to every attainment, and an impulse to every effort,—it will associate the dearest affections of earth with the hopes of heaven’s high felicity,—to blend all our pursuits with the charities of HOME.

PERNICIOUS TENDENCY OF THE STAGE.



The Theatre was, from the very first,
The favourite haunt of sin, though honest men,
Some very honest, wise, and worthy men,
Maintained it might be turned to good account ;
And so, perhaps, it might, but never was.
From first to last, it was an evil place ;
And now such things were acted there, as made
The devils blush ; and from the neighbourhood
Angels and holy men, trembling, retired.

POLLOCK'S *Course of Time*.



WE proceed to show that the stage cannot be included in the category of innocent amusements. With the question of what it might become under proper regulation, it is needless to encumber the present inquiry. Our business is with the stage *as it is*, and as it ever has been. Probably, in deference to the outward decorum of the times, theatrical amusements are upon the whole less characterized by the grosser forms of vice and profanity in our day, than at any former period. We may therefore assume that we see the stage at pre-

sent in its most favourable aspect ; and if, under the restraints of public opinion and a higher tone of moral feeling than heretofore, we shall still find the theatre objectionable in itself and its concomitants, we may very well dispense with the consideration of what it might *possibly become*, in circumstances which have never existed, and in a state of society to which there is little prospect of our speedily attaining. Let it only be remarked in passing, that those advocates of the stage who press this view of the case, admit to a certain extent that the theatre is not at present what it ought to be. The manager of a play-house in Glasgow, in closing the dramatic amusements of the season, assured his audience, “ that the theatre was a powerful instrument for good or bad, and with the support of the moral, it was less likely to conform itself to the immoral.” According to this statement, the moral tendency of the theatre depends very much upon the character of the people who frequent it ; and if it be found that a large proportion of these are not persons, whom, in the eye of Christian charity, we are entitled to regard as exemplifying the morality of the Bible, which we adopt as our standard, but that, on the contrary, theatrical audiences consist mainly—for

it is not to be denied that there are occasional exceptions—of the gay and giddy votaries of pleasure, of the dissipated, the profane, the idle, the frivolous, the debauched and profligate of both sexes, then it becomes a grave question, what possible inducement any man, or any manager, can have, balancing his interests with the tastes of his patrons, to make this “powerful instrument” preponderate on the side of the “good” rather than the “bad.” Is it not to be apprehended that in such circumstances its power will be chiefly exerted on the wrong side? We affirm, and undertake to prove, that it is even so in point of fact. It is the character of the assembly that determines that of the amusement. The dramatic author, the actor, and the manager, must take their cue from the play-goer. The ruling motive is not what will morally benefit the audience, but what will remunerate the manager, and maintain his company. Moral plays will not pay. In the words of Dr. Johnson—

“They who live to please, must please to live.”

Whether we try the stage by the only true standard of morality—that of the Bible—or by the practical test of its social effects, we shall find it indefensible. We shall, in the first

place, briefly examine the morality of stage literature. There is of course nothing inherent in the structure of a drama, any more than in that of an epic poem, or in a dialogue, more than in a monologue or discourse—to prevent it from being made the vehicle of sound principle and healthful sentiment. But the morality of stage plays is not sound, and their sentiment is forced and unnatural. The higher the moral tone of the drama, the more unpalatable would it become to the frequenters of the play-house. The lovers of histrionic amusements would not crowd to the theatre to witness a representation of the moralities and charities of the Bible—purity of heart, poverty of spirit, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, forgiveness, patience, goodness, temperance, sound speech that cannot be condemned, and whatsoever is true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report. Were the advocates of the stage content to rest its claims merely upon its being a place of amusement, this is a test which, we frankly admit, it would be unfair to apply. In that case, all we should require would be that the entertainments be innocent in themselves, and be enjoyed in moderation. But because the amusements are open to serious objections on both these grounds, the friends of the drama feel themselves con-

strained to change their position, and attempt to elevate the theatre to the higher level of a school of virtue. We accept the issue, and go to proof upon it. We try this school of virtue by the only standard of morality to which we can appeal, and find it wanting. The morality of the Divine law would be the death of the play-house. Play-writing, according to a much lower standard of morality than this, but still of a higher type than that of the common literature of the stage, has been tried and proved abortive. Johnson, Hannah More, Young, Addison, and a few other authors of note, have made honest endeavours to raise the tone of histrionic morality; but the annals of the stage record no more conspicuous instances of failure than those of their well-meant efforts. We do not, of course, involve all plays, or all play-goers, or all play-houses, in the same indiscriminate censure. "Some plays are better than other plays; and there may be a very few comparatively pure. Some actors are better than other actors; and a few are in private life comparatively moral men. Some theatres are much worse than other theatres, so as to be comparatively outcasts even from their own class. Some audiences are more select than other audiences; so that the same amount of evil may not be

tolerated by them as by many others. Some spectators may go to the play from mere curiosity, and not from satisfaction, and therefore they are not to be called play-goers;—and some qualities may characterize a whole mass which may not be found in every single part.”* Whilst we grant all this, with one writer against the stage, and admit, with another,† that “as it cannot be affirmed of every one who keeps away from the theatre that he is a true Christian, so neither can it be alleged that every one who goes to it, however seldom, forfeits all title to that character;”—we are bound, nevertheless, speaking of the system as a whole, to avow our solemn conviction that it is radically unsound—unscriptural in its morals, and unsafe in its tendency; and that to resort to the theatre is incompatible with the Christian profession.

Take the writings of Shakspeare, who, in the words of Dryden, “created the stage among us.” Shakspeare was the greatest master of human passion that perhaps ever existed, and but for his matchless productions the dramatic literature of England would be comparatively

* Rev. John M'Donald, Calcutta.

† Dr. Andrew Thomson.

meagre and jejune. It is admitted that Shakspeare was one of the purest writers of the times in which he lived; and this is no mean distinction, for it was an age of loose maxims and looser morals. But having made this statement, we must add most emphatically, that there is not a single play of this great dramatist in which the principles of scriptural morality are not traversed by opinions and sentiments of a directly opposite description, or by profaneness and irreverence shocking to every pious feeling, and not unfrequently by passages of low ribaldry and loathsome impurity, which no man of right principle and proper feeling dare read audibly in the ears of a sister, a daughter, or a wife. Shakspeare wrote for popular amusement. He made no pretensions to the office of a teacher of morals. His own character would not have sustained such a profession. To this fact Mr. J. Payne Collier, in his *History of English Dramatic Poetry and Annals of the Stage*, bears a reluctant testimony, as follows:—"If we may believe the plain import of his 60th sonnet, he was at one period in love with a female who was not very chary of her reputation; . . . and he over and over again laments the disgrace brought upon himself by his misconduct; . . . so that

although it may be very true that no imputation upon his moral character had been discovered from extraneous sources, when Steevens or when Boswell wrote, yet, if we are to believe himself, although a married man, with a wife and family at Stratford, he was not immaculate. The difficulty of reconciling much that is contained in the sonnets, has arisen from an amiable desire to think Shakspeare's moral and poetical character equally perfect. If, in the course of my inquiries, I have been unlucky enough (I may perhaps say) to find anything which represents our great dramatist in a less favourable light, as a human being with human infirmities, I may lament it, but I do not therefore feel myself at liberty to conceal and suppress the fact." The moral blemishes in Shakspeare's plays are usually ascribed to the age which produced them, rather than to the principles and feelings of their author. Be it so,—although after the unsuspicious testimony of Mr. Collier, this apology must be received with some deduction; but if they were the product of a corrupt age, what makes them still acceptable in ours? for they are not, except in their grosser forms, excluded from the expurgated versions prepared for representation on the stage. What if, on the other

hand, some of the least objectionable of the writings of Shakspeare are seldom or never brought on the stage at all?—what if their comparative purity be the chief reason of their exclusion from it? We must not allow our admiration of the genius which conceived and pourtrayed the characters and events depicted in plays still so popular as the two parts of Henry IV., Hamlet, Othello, the Merry Wives of Windsor, the Winter's Tale, Romeo and Juliet, &c., to blind our moral perceptions to the objectionable features discernable in all of them, not excepting even the characters of Hamlet and Ophelia, perhaps amongst the most generally cherished of the dramatist's creations. Dr. Johnson speaks of Ophelia as "the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious," whose "mournful distraction fills the heart with tenderness." And yet this attractive character is repeatedly exhibited in an aspect far from justifying this indiscriminate eulogy on the part of a professed moralist. A quaint writer, at the close of the seventeenth century, contrasting the dramatic authors of antiquity with those of the English stage, observes that the Phædra of Euripides "keeps her modesty even after she has lost her wits;" adding, "Had Shakspeare secured this point for

his young virgin Ophelia, the play had been better contrived. Since he was resolved to drown the lady like a kitten, he should have set her a-swimming a little sooner. To keep her alive only to sully her reputation, and discover the rankness of her breath, was very cruel." *

One of the principal characters in Henry IV. is Sir John Falstaff. None is a greater favourite of play-goers. Sir John is represented as a coward, a knave, a lecherous, treacherous, swagbelly sensualist, with the language of profanity and lasciviousness continually on his lips; but then he is a mirth-inspiring humourist—"a wit himself, and the cause of wit in others." The grosser features of his conduct are either softened and shaded, so as not to prove repulsive, or rendered absolutely attractive by the merriment they excite. Sir John is the most diverting of vagabonds, the most passable of lechers, the drollest in his cups, and the most endurable in his knaveries. To represent him successfully before admiring audiences of men and women, who, it is to be presumed, would not endure in private life a

* View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. By Jeremy Collier, 1698.

person stained with any one of his vices, has made the celebrity of many players. Sir John was so great a favourite with Queen Elizabeth* (who, after all, was no paragon of virtue), when represented in the first and second parts of Henry IV., that she requested Shakspeare to introduce him anew in another play. The poet complied by producing the drama of the Merry Wives of Windsor, in which the favourite character figures as the hero. And still further to show the lingering interest both of the dramatist and the play-goers of his day in that singular delineation of character, after exhibiting Falstaff at the close of Henry IV., by way of moral retribution, as falling into disfavour with his sovereign and former boon companion, who pensions off the worn-out debauchee, and forbids him to come within ten miles of him, the poet, in Henry V., makes a profligate female companion, who survives the knight, tell, with a strange mixture of folly and tenderness, how

* The first plays exhibited before her Majesty were of such a questionable character, and abounded with such coarse and impure allusions, that it is a matter of wonder that even, in that day, a maiden Queen could sanction them by her presence. Some of these productions are still extant, but they are quite unfit for modern perusal. —*The Stage, Ancient and Modern*, by Mr. Close, of Cheltenham.

fine his end was, "parting at the turn of the tide," wandering in his wits, laughing at his finger-ends, and "babbling of green fields." We select this astonishing conception of the poet's genius, as illustrating the seductive charm with which he has contrived to invest a character which, viewed in the abstract, is one of loathsome earthliness and impurity. Hence its reproduction in these successive works of an author, who, of all men that ever wrote for public amusement, was the least necessitated by an unfertile fancy to reproduce his ideas and characters, seeing that when he "exhausted worlds," he had but to "imagine new;" and hence also the undiminished avidity for the representation of Sir John Falstaff amongst the play-goers of the present day. We make no account of the horde of odious and abandoned reprobates, men and women, who are introduced as the associates of the jovial knight, nor of the lewd and irreverent conversations in which it is their habit to indulge. But we ask, what moral benefit can be derived from our being brought into contact with representations of this base description of character and conduct, even supposing that these are put on the stage for a moral purpose, which nobody will believe who has perused the plays in question?

Or, leaving out of view the moral considerations, can we safely indulge in the amusements of a place where familiarity with such representations is the primary attraction? Let us beware lest, in our admiration of the genius of Shakspeare, we become insensible to the value of those eternal principles of moral truth and duty, which it is but too manifest are seldom regarded in the productions of that noble and brilliant intellect. Is it argued in defence of the representation of degraded characters, that vice is rendered abhorrent by such delineations? The instance just quoted proves the reverse, and it is by no means a solitary case. Familiarity with vice does not breed contempt for it. It loses its natural repulsiveness by repetition :—

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure—then pity—then embrace.”

From the plays of Shakspeare we pass on to other dramatic writings, and avail ourselves of the strictures of the late Dr. Andrew Thomson,*

* *The Sin and Danger of being Lovers of Pleasures more than Lovers of God.* By Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D., of St. George's, Edinburgh.

on several comedies which have long enjoyed a high degree of popularity on the stage. Speaking of the "School for Scandal," he observes—"Impurity is carried so far, that not only are there many jocular allusions to criminal passion and conjugal infidelity, but in one scene (Act iv., scene 2) a gentleman is represented as making dishonourable proposals to a married lady, in terms equally intelligible and unprincipled; and the lady as listening to him with marvellous patience and good humour." We interrupt the quotation to remark, that this is one of the features in which the modern stage contrasts unfavourably with that of the ancients. It has been observed, to the credit of the latter, that neither in the plays of Plautus, of Terence, nor of Aristophanes, are there any instances of debauched married women being introduced upon the stage. In one respect, however, the modern theatre agrees with the ancient, and that is in holding up religious character to public contempt, in the guise of imbecility and hypocrisy. On the Greek stage, says a learned writer, "Gods and men were travestied, gross and obscene language was employed, and virulent invectives and ridicule were cast upon the noblest and best of men." It was thus that the venerable and virtuous Socrates was lam-

pooned in the "Clouds" of Aristophanes; and the profession of religion is still exhibited to the derision of the profane in the odious Tarruffes, Mawworms, and Joseph Surfaces, of modern comedy. But to return,—What is the moral teaching of the "School for Scandal?" "Sobriety, prudence, outward decorum—all that we have from the author in the form of religion—is connected with vile and hardened hypocrisy, in the person of Joseph Surface; while his brother Charles, who defrauds tradesmen, calls justice an 'old, lame, hobbling beldam,' is 'extravagant,' 'loves wine and women,' 'games deep,' and, in short, is a thorough-paced debauchee—is held out as amiable, and made quite fascinating to the female heart, because he has something of a generous temper." The "Beggar's Opera," another popular piece frequently performed, Dr. Thomson characterises as surpassing the greater part of the drama in the objectionable nature of its character, sentiment, and language. "Robbers, pick-pockets, and women of the most abandoned description, constitute the gang that figures in this performance. The whole piece has not one trait of virtue in it to relieve the uniformity of its pollutions." It was a guarded remark of the same writer respecting this play, that he would

not affirm that it had "actually sent young men to the highway, who would not have gone there at any rate." But no such caution is necessary in describing the tendency and effects of a recent piece, dramatized from the story of Jack Sheppard, by Mr. Ainsworth. If the play contains, as doubtless it does, the leading features of that pestilent tale, which professes to depict the life of a highwayman, and the habits of the thieves of London a century or more ago, it is impossible to imagine anything more pernicious to public morals, or more deserving the reprobation of all honest men. And yet Jack Sheppard dramatized was performed on every stage in the kingdom; it had what is called "a run," even at the best conducted theatres in London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow; and one of the songs introduced in the piece, was the favourite of the drawing-rooms for more than one season, although it was expressed in the detestable slang of London pickpockets and courtezans. What effect Jack Sheppard produced on the educated and moral classes of the people, who flocked to see him tricked out as a stage-hero, we cannot tell; what moral lesson they received from his burglaries, his highway robberies, and his prison-breakings, is best known to themselves; but the testimonies of

jail chaplains, and judges in criminal courts, and the confessions of numerous convicts, have over and over again proved that this single production, especially when represented on the stage, has done more to demoralise the lower classes, and send young men to the highway, than any tale or play of modern times. Yet Jack Sheppard continues to keep his popularity on the stage; and has, within the last few months, figured in the play-bills of the first theatres.

The following strictures of the vigorous writer already quoted, on the impurity of the stage, offers a salutary warning to the youth of both sexes:—"Licentious characters, both male and female (observes Dr. Thomson), are brought before us with daring effrontery; language is made use of that would not be endured in a private company; scenes of indelicate humour are exhibited, at which we are expected to laugh; lascivious maxims, *double entendres*, and wanton gestures, are every now and then introduced, as if they were not only allowable, but highly conducive to the interest and effect of the representation; and sometimes an illicit amour, with all its vile and polluted accompaniments, constitutes its very essence and character. This may seem incredible, when it is recollected that every audience at a theatre contains a vast

proportion of females, who are both intelligent and virtuous. But it is nevertheless the fact—and this is the marvel—that females of that honourable description should go where their feelings are to be so rudely insulted by every shabby fellow, and by every infamous woman, who may happen to be a player. When anything of this kind occurs, indeed, they look very grave and simple, and appear to be quite ignorant of its meaning. But do they really imagine that they get credit for this grimace? that we have such a low opinion of their acuteness, as to believe that they do not understand what is going on?—that if we admit their want of penetration, we can also admit their want of suspicion, which is the same thing, in such cases, to a chaste and delicate mind?—that we do not consider their behaviour, on these occasions, as a mere compromise between regard to appearances, and passion for amusement? And if we are convinced that the coarse joke, or the unchaste innuendo, is perfectly intelligible to them, though they pretend otherwise, what are we to think of the real state of their principles and feelings? Leaving religion out of view, are they such as every good man must always wish the fair sex to be, when they voluntarily put themselves in the way, and passively submit

to the affronts that are publicly offered to them, merely because they wish to have an evening's diversion? But if the influence of the gospel be permitted to operate, which of them that feels and cherishes that influence, can suffer what it so pointedly condemns, and against which it so earnestly cautions believers? If they truly love God, will not they have respect to all His commandments? And has He not expressly prohibited 'filthiness, and foolish talking, and jesting, which are not convenient?' . . . Nor is the argument to be limited to the female sex. It applies itself with perfect justice to the other sex also." And again, "I put it to every candid and consistent moralist to say, what pretensions our sex can have to Christian propriety, or the fair sex to virtuous sentiment, when they consent to place their feelings for the time, under the sway of a profligate or a kept-mistress, and to derive their amusement from the tragic or the comic efforts of persons who are utterly destitute of all that should command esteem; who are flagrantly bloated with all that should excite aversion and abhorrence."

The tendency of the literature of the stage to run into dangerous excess, is illustrated by the remarkable fact, that it is the only literature in this country which is placed under a

legal censorship. Every play, before being put upon the stage, is licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, whose duty it is to see that it does not transgress the bounds of moral or political propriety. The surveillance is not very searching, as the moral state of the drama proves. To exercise such a power too faithfully would be fatal. Its existence, however, evinces a salutary distrust on the part of the law, of a species of amusement which is peculiarly liable to abuse ; and the same prudent caution is shown in the limitation of the number of play-houses, each of which also requires a special license.

In France, where the censorship is still more lax, so far as morality is concerned, although stringent enough politically, the most unblushing abominations and horrid blasphemies are exhibited on the stage. Of late years, notices have repeatedly appeared in the public prints, of representations in the theatres of Paris, of some of the most solemn events recorded or foretold in the sacred Scriptures. The death of Christ, and the last judgment, have been performed by French players, before audiences calling themselves Christian, for the purpose of gratifying an unhallowed appetite for excitement. During the late revolutionary changes in that country, the fall of man, and the expulsion of our first

parents from paradise, formed the theme of a political farce in Paris, got up for the purpose of satirising the Socialist maxim of the notorious Proudhon,—“La propriété c’est le vol,”—Property is robbery. An angel was represented with a flaming sword, driving our first parents out of Eden, which they were seen leaving with grotesque and wanton gestures; and the appearance of the serpent, wearing a hat and spectacles, like Proudhon’s, gave piquancy to the political allusions of the play.* The moral condition of the French stage has been described in a candid manner, by Mr. Charles Mathews, manager of the Lyceum Theatre, London, in a letter published in August last, and addressed to the dramatic authors in France.† Anticipating that the new international copyright law will have the effect of opening a market for their productions in this country, Mr. Mathews warns the French dramatists to be more circumspect than heretofore in the style of their compositions, and to write in a manner more

* From an eye-witness.

† *Lettre de M. Charles Mathews aux Auteurs Dramatiques de la France*: with a translation according to the terms of the international Convention.—Letter from Mr. Charles Mathews to the dramatic authors of France. Translated from himself by himself.

becoming the refinement of the English taste, if they wish to reap any benefit from the new act. It is certainly creditable to the London stage as compared with that of Paris, that out of 263 new pieces produced in Paris, in the year 1851, only eight were adopted and translated for the London houses; the rest being "too full of indecency, anachronism, immorality, and dirt," to be acceptable to an English audience. It is not every day that a player bears testimony to the immorality of the stage; and here is Mr. Mathews' account of the general character and reception of the dramas that entertain the most play-loving people in the world:—"The curtain rises. In walks a pretty woman—a woman of rank and fashion—into an elegant boudoir. 'Ah, ah!' you say, 'now we are all right!' Are you, my good friend? Wait a moment. It soon comes out that the lady is the affianced bride of one worthy man, the wife of another, in love with a third, and with a child by a fourth; notwithstanding all which, she is just as much beloved by indulgent audiences, who invariably contrive to find some mitigating circumstance to justify her interesting little irregularities.

"We may try our fortune at the other theatres, but it is everywhere the same. Milli-

ners' girls and lawyers' clerks, living together in the most unceremonious manner. Actresses talking openly, and unblushingly, of their numerous lovers. Ballet-girls, with accidental children by unknown fathers. Interesting young ladies, . . . in short, nothing but mistresses, accoucheurs, . . . in every direction."

But Mr. Mathews gives us, in passing, a glance at some of the London theatres also. Drury Lane is abandoned to English operas and ballets—"it is the mausoleum of Shakspeare." Covent Garden is given up to Italian operas. Twelve theatres in the outskirts of London, viz., Surrey, Astley's, Victoria, Queen's, Marylebone, Sadler's Wells, City, Standard, Pavilion, Grecian Saloon, Britannia Saloon, and Bower Saloon, "have an audience of their own, and a jolly one it is . . . with the digestion of an ostrich—always ready to bolt the raw material provided for it." To descend to particulars, we have the following graphic description of the Victoria :—"The Victoria is a model house, the type of a school to which it gives its name. It is the incarnation of the English 'domestic drama,' or rather of the drama of English domestics. There you will always find the truest pictures of virtue in rags, and vice in fine linen. There flourish the choicest specimens of all the

crimes that make life hideous—robbery, rape, murder, suicide. It is a country abounding in grand combats of four—a region peopled with angelic maid servants, comic house-breakers, heroic sailors, tyrannical masters, poetical clod-hoppers, and diabolical barons. The lower orders rush there in mobs, and in shirt sleeves, applaud frantically, drink ginger beer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orange peel and apples by way of bouquets.” Again, “The City is the natural son of the Victoria, and inherits its parent’s tastes. It has the same task to fulfil. It is a sort of Newgate Calendar dramatised—an Apotheosis of the seven deadly sins—a chapel of ease to the Old Bailey.

“At the Pavilion, the shipping interest is represented . . . As you enter you smell the ‘distempered sea.’ The object of the management is to ‘hold the mirror up’ to sailors. An eternal tide of marine melo-dramas and nautical novelties ebbs and flows in this dry Naumachia, where ‘life afloat’ is depicted by fresh-water seamen before an audience of real tars. I leave you to judge whether the pieces are not likely to be pitched tolerably strong to suit the web-footed connoisseurs who roll in at half price, who help to whistle the act music, and . . .

whose sides are only to be tickled with points like pikes, quips like quids, and jokes like junk."

Dramatic exhibitions, in the age of Shakspeare, wanted one fertile source of vice and corruption to which subsequent times gave rise. At that period women were not allowed to appear upon the stage. In this respect the English theatre followed the example of that of ancient Greece, which, heathen as it was, excluded female actors from the stage. This was felt to be due to the character of woman, and to the interests of public morality. Whatever tends to degrade woman from her feminine delicacy, sentiment, and purity of heart, must deteriorate social morality. It is admitted that amongst the females who have chosen theatricals as a profession, instances have not been rare of high dramatic genius combined with irreproachable moral character; and sorry should we be to deny to humbler talent the possession of a virtuous safeguard against the temptations to which the actress is exposed from her habits and companionships; but after making every allowance which the utmost charity can demand, the mournful fact still remains, that woman has but too frequently become first the victim and then the instrument of theatrical immorality. The presence

of profligate women in the theatre, whether on the stage or in the audience—and we doubt if there be any play-house without them—adds momentous importance to the objections against histrionic amusements derived from the general tenor and tendency of dramatic literature ; and justifies the following solemn and pointed admonitions of Mr. Todd of Philadelphia, addressed to young men :*—“ I may here say, and I wish it to be remembered, that the Bible is not merely a book of religion. It is a book of philosophy also. You will recollect how frequently, how earnestly, and how emphatically that book warns the young man against the enticements, the words even, of abandoned women. Others may tempt and draw away, but she casts down her thousands, and her strong men are slain. The philosophy of it is, that one impure look from woman’s eye, and one impure word from woman’s lips, will do more towards polluting the imagination, and destroying the heart of a young man, than any amount of temptation from his own sex. We look for purity in women, and there we generally find it; and when we do not, her words are death. It is this fact in the consti-

* *Lectures on Great Cities*, by Rev. John Todd.

tution of our nature, that makes the presence of abandoned females so dangerous at the theatre, and which leads the Bible to place such stress upon their influence."

It is observable also that theatrical amusements in the Shaksperian period took place in broad day-light, at three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was customary for ladies and gentlemen, after attending the play, to take their walks in the public gardens. The performances in the ancient Athenian theatre were likewise exhibited in daylight and in the open air, in a vast uncovered amphitheatre. Whatever other faults may have been chargeable against these amusements, they were free from the moral and physical evil of late hours, an unwholesome atmosphere, and prolonged emotional excitement, stimulating without invigorating, and deleterious alike to mind and body; and also from the lures spread for youth in the silence and obscurity of midnight, by those "whose house is the way to hell, leading down to the chambers of death." The histrionic scene and its accessories, inflaming the passions, and giving a loose rein to a prurient imagination, have prepared many a young man for becoming the prey of those who "sleep not, except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken

away, unless they cause some to fall." The haunts of drunkenness, debauchery, and infamy, which in every city are observed to cluster round the theatre as its natural parasites, afford fearful evidence of the connection subsisting betwixt the love of this amusement and dissoluteness of manners. With what consistency can a frequenter of the theatre pray—(if he prays)—“Lead me not into temptation?”

The plays of Shakspeare are further open to censure on account of their profanity. That law of the decalogue which says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,” is violated with painful frequency both in the tragedies and comedies of the great dramatist. But profane swearing is a fault common to most plays; and where oaths are wanting in the originals, they are supplied by the players *ad libitum*. This is technically called “spicing.” And so habitually has this vice been indulged in by players, in all periods of stage history, that so early as the reign of James VI., an act was passed “for the preventing and avoiding of the great abuse of the holy name of God in stage-plays, interludes, &c.” It was remarked of some one that when he had nothing to say, he swore; and many stage jokes owe their piquancy solely to the oath

with which they are pointed. "Swearing (says Jeremy Collier, speaking of the profaneness of the stage), is no ordinary relief. It stands up in the room of sense, gives spirit to a flat expression, and makes a period musical and round. In short, 'tis all the rhetoric some people are masters of."

From the time of Shakspeare, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, to that of Charles II., the English stage became more and more gross and debasing. It is described by Jeremy Collier as being "superlatively corrupt," and "exceeding the liberties of all times and countries." For most evils, he remarks, some precedents may be pleaded, but here was fresh discovery, "a new world of vice found out, and planted with all the industry imaginable." To such an extent did irreligion prevail in the reign of Charles I., that plays were usually acted on the Lord's-day; and Mr. J. P. Collier, the annalist of the English stage, relates that the Bishop of London had Shakspeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" represented in his house in the metropolis, on Sunday, September 27, 1631. The Puritans applied a temporary check to the progress of the evil, by closing the theatres and suppressing histrionic entertainments; but the restoration of Charles II. was the signal

for the introduction of universal depravity, and the theatre, which was immediately revived, partook of the licentiousness and profanity of the time. Mr. Macaulay does great injustice to the character and motives of the Puritans in the following extract from his history, but it is quoted here as embodying an important testimony to the condition of stage morality in the middle of the seventeenth century:—"From the day on which the theatres were re-opened they became seminaries of vice; and the evil propagated itself. The profligacy of the representations soon drove away sober people. The frivolous and dissolute who remained, required every year stronger and stronger stimulants. Thus the artists corrupted the spectators, and the spectators the artists, till the turpitude of the drama became such as must astonish all who were not aware that extreme relaxation is the natural effect of extreme restraint, and that an age of hypocrisy is, in the regular course of things, followed by an age of impudence." It may be added, that it was before the stage had reached this degree of dissoluteness, that female characters in plays were first performed by women, an innovation which no doubt tended powerfully to aggravate the demoralising influence of the system, and land it in that lowest depth of

degradation which the historian here laments. The first women who appeared on the boards of an English theatre, belonged to a French company who visited London in 1629, and, according to Prynne, a contemporary writer, "attempted to act a French play at the play-house, in Blackfriars, an impudent, shameful, unwomanish, and graceless attempt." Another writer of the time says—"Those women did attempt, thereby giving just offence to all virtuous and well-disposed persons in this town, to act a certain lascivious and unchaste comedye, in the French tonge, at the Black-fryers. Glad I am to saye they were hissed, hooted, and pippin-pelted from the stage." In 1663 the names of English actresses appear in the play-bills.

The condition of the stage during the reign of Queen Anne, the golden age of English literature, when we might look for some improvement corresponding to the refined sentiments of the times, is described in the *Spectator*, by Addison and Steele, warm admirers of the drama, to the authorship of which they both contributed. First, as regards the state of public taste, Addison, in a paper on the artifices resorted to by play-writers to excite terror and pity in the minds of an audience,

points out as the most absurd and barbarous, "that dreadful butchering of one another, which is very frequent upon the English stage." "To delight (he says) in seeing men stabbed, poisoned, racked, or impaled, is certainly the sign of a cruel temper." "It is, indeed, very odd (he adds, referring to the better feelings manifested by the French in this respect) to see our stage strewn with carcases in the last scenes of a tragedy ; and to observe in the wardrobe of the play-house several daggers, poniards, wheels, bowls for poison, and many other instruments of death." But this is nothing compared to the testimony of Steele on the moral abuses of the stage at this time, which, it is to be remembered, was not preceded by "an age of hypocrisy," but one of unbounded libertinism. The *Spectator* having received from a female correspondent a remonstrance against an unchaste allusion in one of Sir Richard Steele's plays, that writer made the letter the subject of the moral strictures from which we are about to quote, and afterwards expunged from his comedy all its obnoxious passages. He ascribes the immodest character of many plays to dearth of invention on the part of authors, and a depraved taste on that of audiences. He pleads ironically on

behalf of a writer who has to keep up a sprightly dialogue for five acts together, that he may be allowed, "when he wants wit, and cannot please any otherwise, to help it out with a little smuttiness." "When the author cannot strike out of himself any more of that which he has superior to those who make up the bulk of his audience, his natural recourse is to that which he has in common with them; and a description which gratifies a sensual appetite will please, when the author has nothing about him to delight a refined imagination." "This expedient to supply the deficiencies of wit, has been ^{at} used more or less by most of the authors who have succeeded on the stage; though I know but one who has professedly writ a play upon the basis of the desire of multiplying our species, and that is the polite Sir George Etheridge; if I understand what the lady would be at, in the play called 'She would if she could.' Other poets have here and there given us intimation that there is this design, under all the disguises and affectations which a lady may put on; but no author, except this, has made sure work of it, and put the imaginations of the audience upon this one purpose from the beginning to the end of the comedy. It has always fared accordingly; for

whether it be that all who go to this piece would if they could, or that the innocent go to it, to guess only what she would if she could, *the play has always been well received.*" Again, "It lifts an heavy empty sentence, when there is added to it a lascivious gesture of body; and when it is too low to be raised even to that, a flat meaning is enlivened by making it a double one." "When a poet flags in writing lasciviously, a pretty girl can move lasciviously, and have the same good consequence for the author." And not to multiply similar testimonies from the same writer as to the dress (or the want of it) of females on the stage, and other corrupting influences, for which reference must be made to the paper itself,* Sir Richard winds up his description of the dramatic writings of the same popular class, by female as well as male authors, in the following terms: — "As the male wit gives his hero a great fortune, the female gives her heroine a good gallant at the end of the play. But, indeed, there is hardly a play we can go to, but the hero or fine gentleman of it struts off upon the same account, and leaves us to consider what good office he has put us to, or to employ ourselves

* *Spectator*, No. 51, April 28, 1711.

as we please. To be plain, a man who frequents plays will have a very respectful notion of himself, were he to recollect how often he has been used as a pimp to ravishing tyrants, or successful rakes. When the actors make their exit on this good occasion, the ladies are sure to have an examining glance from the pit, to see how they relish what passè; and a few lewd fools are very ready to employ their talents upon the composure or freedom of their looks. Such incidents as these make some ladies wholly absent themselves from the play-house; and others never miss the first day of a play, lest it should prove too lascivious to admit their going with any countenance to it on the second."

Sir Archibald Alison, in his new volume, occupied with contemporary history,* bears a regretful testimony to the declining prospects and degraded character of "the noble and bewitching art" of the drama at the present time. Sir Archibald has not thought it beneath the dignity of history, or unbecoming the gravity of his judicial character, to devote a page of the *History of Europe* to a panegyric on the

* *History of Europe, from the Fall of Napoleon in 1815, to the Accession of Louis Napoleon in 1852.* By Sir Archibald Alison, Bart., vol. i. 1852.

dramatic genius, "the dark raven locks," and "fine figure," of Miss Helen Faucit, an actress of tragedy. If powers of the very highest order, he remarks, united to "fascinating beauty," and "the most lofty conceptions of the dignity and moral objects of her art, could have arrested the degradation of the stage," this actress would have done so. But she "arose in the decline of the drama," and was "unequal to the task of supporting it in the days of corrupt taste." The eulogy on her high conceptions of the dignity and moral capabilities of her art, is repeated with its extravagant superlatives, after the lapse of a few lines; "but it is all in vain," adds the learned historian, with touching despondency; "she has appeared in the days of the decline of taste, and, notwithstanding her great genius and celebrity, is unable to arrest it. The drama here, as elsewhere, has been in a certain stage of society succeeded by the melo-drama; the theatre by the amphitheatre. Covent Garden has become an Italian, Drury Lane an English, opera-house. Singing and dancing, stimulants to the senses, splendour for the eye, have come to supplant the expression of passion, the display of tenderness, the grandeur of character." Sir Archibald considers this change in the public taste to be due to

“the ascendancy of a middle class in society, the minds in which are not so cultivated as to enable them to enjoy intellectual or moral pleasures, while their senses are sufficiently excited to render them fully alive to the enjoyments of the physical. Disguise it as you will (he continues), that is the real principle. When that class, which is ever a vast majority of mankind, becomes, in the progress of opulence, so rich and powerful that its patronage forms the main support of the theatre, the ruin of the drama is inevitable and at hand.” This statement is scarcely compatible with the well-known fact that the Italian opera in London, which Sir Archibald deplures as having usurped the place of the drama, is almost exclusively supported by the aristocracy. But it is inconsistent with the still more remarkable and important fact, that the decline of the drama synchronizes with a wider diffusion of intelligence and moral principle amongst the middle class, than ever characterized it at any former period; and just because this class has become more susceptible than heretofore of intellectual and moral enjoyments, and therefore more independent of trifling amusements, it has in great measure withdrawn from the theatre; abandoning it, on the

one hand, to the luxurious and sensual of the upper, and, on the other, to the gross and degraded of the lower ranks of the community. The middle rank has always been the most favourable for the cultivation and development of those intellectual and moral habits to which the theatre is most inimical. Without depreciating the excellencies which adorn many of the British aristocracy of the present day, it may be affirmed that the talent, the education, the science, the religion, the active philanthropy, the political influence, the mental and moral energy, and the robust virtues which form the stamina of a state, and "the cheap defence of nations," are mainly concentrated in the middle class of the community.

But Sir Archibald Alison goes a step farther, and affirms that "this change was accelerated, and perhaps prematurely brought on in this country, by the well-meant and sincere, but unfortunate prejudices of a large and respectable portion of society, which withdrew altogether from our theatres, from a natural feeling of indignation at the immorality of some of its [their] dramas, and the license of many of its [their] accessories." We venture respectfully, but firmly, to demur to this extraordinary dictum of judicial wisdom. For what does it

amount to but an attempt to make the religious and the moral of society accountable, in some degree, for the deterioration of the stage? The learned Sheriff seems to take it for granted, that at some period or other the theatre was a place frequented by the Christian and virtuous of the community. We have sought in vain for such an era. It was not, as as has been shown, in the age of Shakspeare and Elizabeth, or of the Stuarts, or of Queen Anne; and for the modern character of plays and the play-house, we are well content to receive the testimony of Sir Archibald Alison. But admitting, for the sake of argument, that the amusements of the stage were once such as could be witnessed with pleasure and profit by Christian men and their families—for it must be *their* “unfortunate prejudices” which are chiefly in the author’s view—we have to ask, why did the stage become corrupt in spite of their presence, unless there be some inherent defect in its constitution? And why are good men to be held responsible for its having sunk to a lower depth in their absence, when it was “the immorality of some of its dramas, and the license of many of its accessories,” that drove them away with “a natural feeling of indignation?” If they were wrong, as our author

thinks, in abandoning the theatre, it must clearly be their duty to return to it. But how, and when, is the derelict amusement to be raised out of the mire of moral pollution, and rendered fit for the participation of the pure and virtuous? The statement of the historian virtually confirms a previous remark, that it is the character of the spectators which determines the nature of the entertainment. Before a thorough reform can be introduced into the theatre, therefore, the great proportion of its audiences must consist of the moral and religious of the community. And in order that even a beginning may be made, men and women, of this high character, must be found animated with a zeal for theatrical reform, which will induce them to divest themselves of "unfortunate prejudices," to repress "natural feelings of indignation," to disregard appearances, to brave temptations, to outface the indecencies of the ballet and melodrama, and the licentiousness of many of the frequenters of the playhouse, in the hope (a somewhat vague one, it must be confessed) of giving to the theatre a moral purity which will repel the dissolute and profligate from its walls! Let the friends of the drama "call such spirits from the vasty deep; but will they come when they do call for them?" We are less concerned

with the historian's reasons than his facts; but they are inextricably interwoven, and we, therefore, quote the remainder of his remarks on this subject:—"There can be no doubt," he continues, "it would be well if these abuses could be corrected; and it would also be well if corruption could be banished from literature, vice from the world. Unfortunately the one is not more likely to happen than the other. Both spring from the universal corruption of our nature, and will cease when we are no longer children of Adam; but not till then." The fallacy of the illustration here employed is apparent. We do not attempt to purify literature of a vicious and demoralizing description, by recommending respectable people to read it; nor do we censure those who, for moral reasons, have discontinued its perusal, as having been instrumental, from their "unfortunate prejudices," in rendering it more debasing than it was before. And sure we are that, in his judicial capacity, our respected Sheriff does not illustrate his own argument, by encouraging the practice of vice as a means of "banishing it from the world." Yet he contends that the stage has become degraded because good men would not stand by it, despite their indignation at its immoralities and licentiousness. Once more—"The only effect of this portion of society

withdrawing from our theatres has been, that *their direction has fallen into the hands of the unscrupulous. Their support of the profligate, and the licentious characters of their representations, have, in consequence, been greatly increased.* We cannot destroy the art of Æschylus, Shakspeare, and Schiller, but we may alter its character, and degrade its direction; and the unhappy result of the respectable classes withdrawing from the theatre, has been too often to convert what might be, at least occasionally, the school of virtue, *into the academy of vice.*" There is nothing new in this method of reasoning the question. A writer in support of the stage, half a century ago, fell upon much the same line of argument as Sir Archibald Alison has adopted in his history; but instead of merely reproaching the respectable classes for neglecting or relinquishing the theatre, he boldly took up positive ground, and made it "matter of duty" to attend plays, and to "do good in the face of prejudice." To this argument the celebrated Dr. Witherspoon, in a treatise on the stage,*—now less known than it deserves to be—replied thus

* *A Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage.* By John Witherspoon, D.D., sometime minister of the gospel at Paisley, and late President of Princeton College, New Jersey, 1805.

pointedly:—"But how shall we refute this new and wonderful doctrine, of its being necessary that good men should attend the theatre? I cannot think of a better way of doing it, than tearing off some of the drapery of words with which it is adorned and disguised, and setting his own assertions together in the form of a syllogism:—

"The manager of every theatre must suit his entertainments to the company, and if he is not supported by the grave and sober, he must suit himself to the licentious and profane :

"We know that in every nation there must be amusements and public entertainments, and the stage has always made one in every civilized and polished nation. We cannot hope to abolish it :

"*Ergo*, according to this author, it is the duty of good men to attend the stage.

"But I leave the reader to judge whether, from the first of his propositions, which is a certain truth, it is not more just to infer, that till the majority of those who attend the stage are good, its entertainment cannot be fit for the Christian ear ; and because that will never be, no Christian ought to go there. And what a shameful begging of the question is his second proposition, 'That we cannot hope to abolish

it.' It is hard to tell what we may hope for in this age, but we insist that it ought to be abolished. Nay, we do hope to abolish it just as much as other vices. We cannot hope to see the time when there shall be no gaming, cheating, or lying; but we must still preach against all such vices, and will never exhort good men to go to gaming tables, to persuade them to play fair, and lessen the wickedness of the practice."



THE SCHOOL OF VIRTUE;

ITS SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS.



Slight those who say, amidst their sickly healths,
"Thou livest by rule." What doth not so but man?
Houses are built by rule, and Commonwealths.
Entice the trusty sun, if that you can,
From his ecliptic line;—beckon the sky.
Who lives by rule, then, keeps good company.

By all means use sometimes to be alone.
Salute thyself; see what thy soul doth wear.
Dare to look in thy chest—for 'tis thine own,—
And tumble up and down what thou find'st there.
Who cannot rest till he good fellows find,
He breaks up house, turns out of doors his mind.

GEORGE HERBERT.



Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT.

ECCLESIASTES.



THE defenders of dramatic amusements maintain that the stage is a school of morality. We have seen some of the lessons which it teaches. Let us next examine the scholars and the teachers as to the soundness of this claim. In the first place, does the general character of the frequenters of the theatre indicate that

their purpose in attending it is to receive moral instruction? and do they really derive moral benefit from the lessons it inculcates, and the examples it displays? None stand more in need of such influences than many of both sexes who are nightly within its walls. Sir Walter Scott, who was no enemy to the drama, writing to Southey, describes a London theatrical audience in the following terms:—"One-half come to prosecute their debaucheries, so openly that it would degrade a bagnio. Another set, to snooze off their beef-steaks and port wine; a third, are critics of the fourth column of the newspaper." A part of most theatres is appropriated for the accommodation of females of abandoned character. In Drury Lane a saloon is set apart expressly for the purpose of introducing the licentious of either sex to each other. When Mr. Macready, whom we name with respect, as the most earnest dramatic reformer of the day, became the lessee of Drury Lane, some years ago, he resolved to purge the stage of low and immoral plays, and replace the melo-drama with the tragedies of Shakspeare and the higher dramatists. He determined further to exclude from the house all females of an improper character. He made known his motives and intentions in a published prospectus,

and invited the support of a moral and respectable class of play-goers. Many, in common with ourselves, watched the progress of this instructive experiment on the taste and moral feeling of play-goers. The sock was displaced for the buskin. Shakspeare was produced in his least obnoxious aspects; frivolous melodramas, profane and impure interludes, and wanton and indecent dancing, were discarded. Profligate women were refused admittance. What was the consequence? The legitimate drama, as it was termed, failed to attract the moral class of society; the *habitués* of the place withdrew, when their gross appetites were no longer gratified with garbage; and the licentious of one sex having been ejected, those of the other sex had no longer any inducement to frequent the house. The plan notoriously proved a complete failure, and was abandoned in despair, after involving Mr. Macready in serious loss. The theatre in question reverted to the practice from which few or none can afford to deviate, that of admitting improper characters—of furnishing special accommodation for them,—and of providing fitting amusements for them. If the play-house be a school of morals, and not “an academy of vice,” what inducement have the vicious and the vile to frequent it? And

if its entertainments are adapted to *their* tastes, what effect are they calculated to produce upon the pure and virtuous? Is the moral atmosphere of the place such as the two classes ought to breathe together? From amusements which the one can enjoy with as much zest as the other, it is worse than idle to talk of deriving moral instruction. It is not denied that moral lessons are occasionally inculcated on the stage in its present state ; but its whole history warrants the affirmation, that were this the usual character and tendency of its teaching, nothing would be so distasteful and unattractive to the great majority of its friends and admirers. Neither "the many-headed monster of the pit," nor the *dii minores* of the gallery, would long be gratified with that description of pleasure, which, according to Seneca, the gods enjoy when they look upon a virtuous man struggling with misfortunes ; and moral precepts and virtuous examples on the stage would speedily show "a beggarly account of empty boxes."

There is something ineffably fulsome in this cant about the virtue of the theatre, as if the attractiveness of the stage culminated in the representation of a moral piece, and the appearance of a moral player ; whereas it is well known

that there are not in existence, in the English language, or in the whole literature of the stage, as many moral plays as would stock a theatre, and render it independent of objectionable pieces; and as for the players, whilst we desire to bring no railing accusation against them as a class, it is not to be denied, that if their profession and aims are virtuous, they exhibit a marvellous inaptitude for learning their own lessons. The virtues of the stage are not the virtues of Christianity; and not being Christian, they are anti-Christian; for here there is no middle term, and no neutrality. "He that is not with me, is against me," was the declaration of the Great Teacher. It is equally true, that natural feelings and emotions are not represented on the stage. The pure pathos and tenderness of common life could not be acted without revolting an audience. Pathetic feeling must therefore be mingled with ingredients of a more exciting kind. Hence immoderate love, disappointment, jealousy, revenge, pride, ambition, suicide, and murder, form the prominent features in tragedies; and gallantry and intrigue, prodigality in the guise of generosity, profanity dignified with the name of spirit, and vice in the garb of wit and humour, furnish the chief materials of comedies. In such represen-

tations the simple feelings of nature are outraged, human life and experience are shown through a false and deceptive medium, moral principle is distorted, religion is insulted, and its professors are turned into ridicule. "How often," says Mr. Angell James,* "is some profligate rake introduced to the spectators, furnished with a few traits of frankness and generosity, to interest them by his vicious career, and who so far reconciles them all to his crimes, as to tolerate his atrocities, for the sake of his open-hearted, good-humoured virtues. Who can wonder that young women should be prepared by such stuff, for any intrigue with a bold and wily adventurer? or that young men should be encouraged to play the good-natured heroic rake, which they have seen such a favourite with the public on the stage? Besides, how saturated are both tragedies and comedies with irreverent appeals to heaven, profane swearing, and all the arts of equivocation, and falsehood, and deception! What lascivious allusions are made, what impure passages are repeated! What a fatal influence must this have upon the delicacy of female modesty! . . . Little will go down with the public in

* *The Christian Father's Present to his Children.* By J. A. James.

the shape of comedy, farce, or opera, but what is pretty highly seasoned with indelicate allusions. Hence it is, that even the newspaper critics, whose morality is, in general, not of the most saintly character, so often mention the too-barefaced indecencies of new plays.* Again, "How many sentiments are continually uttered on the stage, how many indelicate allusions are made, which no man who had any regard to the virtue of his sons, or the feelings of his daughters,

* The following notice of a popular farce of the current season is not quoted as a case in point, for it indicates an indelicacy without rebuking it, but as affording an undesigned testimony to the depraved tastes of London play-goers:—"A short dramatic tale, in which some new adventures of the celebrated Messrs. Box and Cox are set forth, is the successful novelty at the Haymarket. Box and Cox are, as the bills inform us, now supposed to be "married and settled;" and the dramatic happiness of Cox receives a transient interruption through the suspicion that too great an intimacy has existed between Mrs. Cox and Box. However, the cloud blows over, and the friendship of the modern Orestes and Pylades is more firmly cemented than ever. Those little circumstances of dramatic discomfort which particularly delight a London audience are plentifully introduced; and who could refrain from laughter when Mesdames Box and Cox fall out at breakfast, and Mr. Cox gets into a street row on the subject of an umbrella? Much as the Englishman reveres the domestic hearth, he [the play-goer] is never more amused than when he sees it converted into a field of battle."—*Spectator*, Oct. 16, 1852.

would allow to be uttered at his table? Are not whole passages repeatedly recited, which no modest man would allow to be read before the family? Nothing but the countenance of numbers could induce many females to sit and listen to that which they hear at the theatre. Were any man to quote, in company, some of the expressions which are in constant iteration at the play-house, would he not be regarded as a person most dangerous to the virtue of others? And yet these nauseating exhibitions are heard with pleasure, when they are heard with the multitude. Can this be friendly to modesty, to virtue, to piety? Must there not be an insensible corrosion going on under such an influence upon the fine polish of female excellence, and upon the moral principle of the male sex? Is this avoiding the appearance of evil?"

To the above testimony may be added that of Mr. Binney* on the same point:—"The countenance and encouragement which the theatre gives to vice; the stimulus applied to the passions by the nature of the performances, and the excited emotions, the language, the gestures, the dress of the performers themselves; the

* *Objections to Theatrical Amusements.* A discourse by the Rev. Thomas Binney, London.

nature of the audience, composed for the most part of the doubtful and the bad; the facilities afforded to prostitutes to mingle with the company in every part of the house (or almost every part), and the perfectly understood and recognised arrangement by which from some parts of the house the modest and virtuous of the sex, the wives and sisters of gentlemen, are systematically excluded,—these are things that constitute our reasons for condemning the theatre, even when we take no higher ground than a becoming regard to the morals of the people. Excluding religion altogether—leaving out of view the peculiar views and professions of piety—reasoning as if there were no such book as the New Testament in the world, with its spiritual functions and unearthly demands on the habits and the heart—feeling and thinking, if you please, as mere moral philanthropists, the friends and advocates of decency and decorum, the protectors of youth, the guardians of man's innocence, and of woman's imagination,—on this ground, independently of all others of a higher character, it is our deep and solemn conviction, that theatres deserve nothing from the thoughtful and the pure but unmitigated and unequivocal condemnation.”

The late Mr. Macdonald of Calcutta, a man of

eminent talent and piety, was, in his youth, devotedly fond of theatrical amusements, and his testimony to their pernicious effects is the result of personal experience and observation. He speaks of evils which he has seen and known, and with touching humility and frankness meets in his own person the argument usually employed by the defenders of the theatre, when instances are pointed out to them of the demoralising influence of the stage, upon the character of individuals. Referring to his own experience of this malignant influence, he anticipates the reply, that this arose from the peculiar badness of his own heart. "Be it so," is the rejoinder—"his heart was bad; very bad. But here lies the question again in its turn, 'Why did *so bad* a heart find such delight in the *play-house*?'"

The evidence of such a witness is invaluable, and here is his description of the average character of the frequenters of the play in London:—"What class of the rich habitually occupy the boxes? Let West-end tradesmen say—let Tattersal and Crockford tell. Do you want the scum of vicious poverty? You will find it in the gallery. Do you want the froth of vicious mediocracy? You will find abundance in the pit. Why does the swindler love the play? Why does the gambler love the play? Why does

the forger love the play? Why does the horse-jockey love the play? Why does the scoffer at religion love the play? Why does the backslider from the worship of God love the play? Why does the man that never prays love the play? Why does the apostate love the play? Why do fashionable swearers love the play? Why do shameless adulterers love the play? Why do embezzling clerks love the play? Why do those that never enter a church love the play? Why is it, in short, that all the very worst classes of society delight to frequent the theatre? Is it because it is good, or because it is evil? That there are moral persons who also go there on select occasions, we admit; but it is undeniable that actors do not expect their benefits from them; they would distrust their largest payers, and be ashamed of their best attendants." Speaking of the uniformly bad character of the precincts of the London play-houses, the same writer says:—"Ministerial duties compelled us to pass through certain theatrical neighbourhoods, and the scenes which we saw prevented our doubting, what at least one large portion of a London population judged even its best theatres to be. We remember once discussing the merits of the stage with a gentleman of liberal profession, and a native

of London, who endeavoured to take up the ground that the stage was moral in its tendency; but when asked why, if theatres were so moral, their immediate localities were sinks of vice, and their porticoes thronged by the expectants of iniquity, he replied, 'I acknowledge the difficulty, and I cannot account for the fact according to my views.' Nor could he; but we can, in the trite old adage, 'Where the carcass is, there also shall the vultures be gathered together.'"

From a statement in a work on *Fashionable Amusements*, it appears that Mr. Macready's experiment was not the only attempt to purify the "school of morality" in Drury Lane. When the theatre was under a numerous proprietary, it was remitted to the Committee of Management (including several distinguished senators of both Houses of Parliament), to consider a proposal to exclude females of a certain character from the house; but in the Committee's report, "the measure was over-ruled, under the conviction that, if adopted, the institution could not be supported!" A similar result followed an effort to reform the Tremont Theatre in Boston. The trustees protested even against an order of council prohibiting intoxicating liquors to be sold on the premises, alleging that it was

impossible to maintain the theatre without it. In the United States, as in our own country, a reformed theatre could not exist, were it practicable.

Some years ago, the *Literary Gazette* raised a powerful protest against the licentious tendencies of the dramatic representations popular on the London boards, lamenting that, as the true drama declined, meretricious attractions were multiplied. The writer says, "The liberal and wanton exhibition of the female person became common, was tolerated, applauded, sapped the public taste, and now revels in triumphant impurity." "The saloons have long been infamous: the representations behind the curtain are now pretty much on a par with the saloons. If you seat yourself or family in a public box, the chances are, that you are mixed up with a class whose manners and conversation shock every sense of decency." This was in February, 1834. In the following month, a theatrical fund anniversary meeting was held, and the drama lauded as the great engine of morality, and handmaid of genuine religion: the "Puritans" were denounced for discouraging the stage, and the aid of the press was invoked on behalf of the theatre. The same periodical responded to the appeal, by demanding, as a

condition to its support, that the drama should no longer "retrograde into licentiousness, and take the lead in corrupting public morals;" adding, that the age of Charles II. was exceeded in grossness by the exposures in such pieces as the "Revolt of the Harem," and the "Masked Ball." "It may not be expedient for the pulpit to notice this foul and corrupting tone which now prevails so entirely in theatres, that it is hardly possible for a modest woman to visit one of them without having her feelings exposed to outrage; but it would, in our judgment, be a still greater breach of its trust in the press to uphold it. The bishop of London has foiled one attempt to travesty the Scripture; but he cannot stem the tide of obscenity and pimping which make our national drama a national obloquy."—(*Lit. Gaz.*, March, 1834.) Should any friend of the drama consider it unfair to implicate the theatres of the present day in the vices which stamped them eighteen years ago, we must refer him to the testimony of Sir A. Alison to the continued decline of dramatic taste, of which, also, Mr. C. Mathews has furnished some instructive examples in his letter. But we have yet another witness to call, whose evidence, from recent personal observation, identifies, in the

present condition of the stage, all the vicious and repulsive features which writers have described since the time of Sir John Hawkins (the biographer of Dr Johnson), who characterized the play-house, and the region about it, as "the hot-beds of vice." Mr. Samuel James Button, who furnished Mr. Binney of London with some illustrations of the present state of the stage, affirms that all the enormities detailed by earlier and later writers, and many others which had escaped their notice, had fallen under his own observation. "Though never officially connected with the stage in any capacity whatever, yet peculiar circumstances gave me, for several years, free access, by day and night, to both before and behind the curtain of our principal winter and summer metropolitan theatres, and also threw me into intimacy with many of their authors, managers, and chief performers ; consequently, there is no part of stage economy with which I am unacquainted. And it is my personal, complete knowledge of that economy, which forces upon me the conviction, that, were another Ezekiel to arise, and another angel to descend to exhibit to him the 'greater' and 'greater abominations' of this land, he would reserve, for the astonished and indignant prophet, a display of

the *iniquities of a London theatre*, as the last and most fearful ‘chamber of imagery.’ ”

There must be something radically defective in a system which, in all ages, has been regarded by wise and good men as a source of danger to the best interests of society. Plato described plays as exciting the passions, and perverting the use of them. Aristotle suggested that young people should be forbidden by law to witness comedies. Tully denounced licentious plays and poems as the bane of society. Livy remarked that plays were introduced amongst the Romans to pacify the gods and remove a mortality, but that the remedy proved worse than the disease. Tacitus reproached Nero for having hired decayed gentlemen for the stage, observing that it was a prince’s part to relieve their necessity, and not to tempt it. He also observes that the German women preserved their honour by having no theatres amongst them. Plutarch spoke of plays as the corrupters of youth. Solon, Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, and Cato, are also amongst the venerable names of antiquity arrayed against the stage. The Athenians had a law that no judge of the Areopagus should degrade himself by writing a play. The Lacedæmonians would not tolerate the stage in any form. The Ro-

mans counted plays discreditable and scandalous, and held players to be degraded and denationalized. When Cæsar compelled Libenius to recite some of his own works on the stage, "Alas!" said the aged man, "I have lived one day too many. I left my house this morning a Roman knight; I return to it this evening an infamous stage-player." To the testimonies of the heathen world against the stage, which are stated more at large by Jeremy Collier, we add those of the Christian world, as summed up by William Prynne, in his *Histriomastix, the Players' Scourge*, published in 1633. This venerable writer made a catalogue of authorities against the stage, which contains every name of eminence in the heathen and Christian worlds; comprehends the united testimony of the Jewish and Christian churches—the deliberate acts of fifty-four ancient and modern, general, national, and provincial councils and synods, both of the Eastern and Western churches—the condemnatory sentence of seventy-one ancient fathers, and one hundred and fifty modern authors, Popish and Protestant—the hostile endeavours of philosophers, and even poets—with the legislative enactments of a great number of Pagan and Chris-

tian states, nations, magistrates, emperors, and princes.

After this accumulation of testimonies against the stage, we are surely warranted in affirming, that it is not from this boasted school of morals that society derives any of those impulses which elevate and improve men in the social scale, restrain vice, stimulate to virtue, and excite to generous efforts to do good ; or which prompt youthful and ingenuous minds to enter upon the path of self-education, to cultivate habits of manly thought and feeling, to cherish pure and simple tastes, and exercise vigorous self-control. From the “relaxing, sentimentalizing, dreamy, passion-stirring atmosphere of a theatre,”—from weeping over scenes of fictitious misery, what man or woman has ever gone forth into the hovels of the poor, and lent a helping hand to raise their inmates from their wretchedness, to educate the ignorant, to reclaim the wandering, to relieve the sick, to cheer the sorrowing, and, were it but by a loving and sympathizing word, to take a single atom from the heap of human suffering, and add it to the sum of human happiness ? Oh ! no. Selfishness is at the bottom of theatrical sentiment, and its tenderness melts into thin

air when brought into contact with the stern realities of life. The tree is known by its fruit. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

If this is all that the theatrical school of morality does for its scholars, let us take a peep behind the scenes, and inquire what it does for its teachers. In a school where the pupils choose their own lessons, it is not to be expected that the teachers will be very rigid in enforcing or exemplifying a high degree of moral principle. The influences of the system are indeed all against the poor player. If he maintains his integrity amidst such a scene of temptations, it is not because of the lessons of the theatre, but in spite of them; and it is to be feared that the instances are rare and exceptional, in which actors possess firmness and fortitude to resist the moral contamination of the place. We shall not go the length of some writers, and maintain that, by identifying themselves with the bad characters they enact, histrionic performers come to lose the perception of moral distinctions; but it is unquestionable that many of them conduct themselves as if it were really true, that on the stage, as well as in the world, "example strikes all human

hearts—a bad example more.” Garrick once boasted to Dr. Johnson, that he entered into the assumed vicious character as if it were his own. “Then,” replied Johnson, “if you really believe yourself such a monster, you ought to be hanged every time you perform it.” A similar sentiment, as to the influence of the lessons upon the teachers in the dramatic school of morals, led an old writer on this subject to remark, that to send young people to the theatre to form their manners, is to expect “that they will learn virtue from profligates, and modesty from harlots.” Did the reader ever hear of a pious actor or actress? of a religious tragedian or religious comedian? Why, the very terms are contradictory. We shall demonstrate presently, by a memorable example, that Scriptural piety is incompatible with the profession of an actor. Nor is it a condition of their being acceptable to the frequenters of the theatre, that they should be either religious or moral. Cases are not infrequent where they have maintained their popularity, notwithstanding their living in notorious disregard of the laws of chastity, or in open violation of the decencies of society. Sir Archibald Alison has honoured the elder Kean with

a niche in the contemporary *History of Europe*, already quoted.* This is what the *Times* journal said of him on one occasion:—"The conduct of persons who appear on the stage has never been the most irreproachable; and it may be doubted whether such a mass of living vice, as the actors and actresses but too generally present in their private lives, is not more injurious to public morals, than the splendid examples of virtue which they exhibit in their theatrical characters are useful. It appears, however, that Kean, the defendant in the cause which was tried yesterday, is advanced many steps in profligacy, beyond the most profligate of his sisters and brethren of the stage. Some of Kean's letters are of so filthy a description that we cannot insert them. Yet have the managers of Drury Lane Theatre the effrontery to present, or to attempt presenting, such a creature to the gaze of a British audience, on Thursday next."—(*Times*, Jan. 18, 1825.)

* The learned Sheriff has lately given a flattering letter of recommendation to the manager of a Glasgow theatre, expressing approval of his efforts to "exclude all the objectionable characters, whose presence have [sic] done so much to injure the cause of the pure and legitimate drama." The manager's circular, containing Sir Archibald's letter, holds out to the play-going public the prospect of an engagement with *Lola Montes*!

We are desirous that the character of the profession should be judged of, not from the opinions of religious writers, but from the testimonies of dramatic and other authors, and of players themselves. Jean Jacques Rousseau will not be suspected of prejudice against the players, from any inclination to favour religion and virtue ; yet this is what he wrote when it was proposed to rear a theatre in Geneva, with the intention of sapping the simple morality of former times :—" The situation of an actor is a state of licentiousness and bad morals ; the men are abandoned to disorder, the women lead a scandalous life ; the one and the other, at once avaricious and profuse, are overwhelmed with debt, and ever prodigal, and as unrestrained in their disposition as they are void of scruple in respect to the means of providing for it. In all countries their profession is dishonourable."

In the memoir of Montague Stanley, to be subsequently quoted, occurs the following letter from a dramatic writer, who was no doubt disposed to take rather a favourable view of the theatre, on the occasion of a young lady being about to adopt the stage (in Edinburgh) as a profession :—" I must give you a caution about Miss L. She will find the theatre a dangerous place for a young person. Many of the women

with whom she must associate are of the worst principles and conduct, and many of the men are insolent and depraved to an excess. If, therefore, she has anything to do with the theatre, you ought to take care of providing some elderly and discreet woman to accompany her there and protect her ; otherwise, however good may be her principles, and regular her conduct, she will be constantly exposed to a thousand insults. A theatre is, in fact, a place into which no woman of delicacy ought to set her foot (behind the scenes, I mean), unless protected by the presence of a husband. I hope you will find this kind of life answer for Miss L.; but I fear the contrary very much. For a man, the case is far different."

We gladly avail ourselves of the opportunity of enriching our pages with the following vigorous and pungent strictures on opera-singers, ballet-dancers, and their audiences, from the pen of Mr. Thomas Carlyle : *—

"Of the Haymarket Opera my account, in fine, is this: Lustres, candelabras, painting, gilding at discretion; a hall as of the Caliph Alraschid, or him that commanded the slaves of the Lamp; a hall as if fitted up by the

* *Keepsake for 1852.*

genies, regardless of expense. Upholstery and the outlay of human capital, could do no more. Artistes, too, as they are called, have been got together from the ends of the world, regardless likewise of expense, to do dancing and singing, some of them even geniuses in their craft. One singer in particular, called Coletti, or some such name, seemed to me, by the cast of his face, by the tones of his voice, by his general bearing, so far as I could read it, to be a man of deep and ardent sensibilities, of delicate intuitions, just sympathies; originally an almost poetic soul, or man of *genius*, as we term it; stamped by nature as capable of far other work than squalling here, like a blind Samson, to make the Philistines sport!

“Nay, all of them had aptitudes, perhaps, of a distinguished kind; and must, by their own and other people’s labour, have got a training equal or superior in toilsomeness, earnest assiduity, and patient travail, to what breeds men to the most arduous trades. I speak not of kings’ grandees, or the like show-figures; but few soldiers, judges, men of letters, can have had such pains taken with them. The very ballet girls, with their muslin saucers round them, were perhaps little short of miraculous; whirling and spinning there in strange mad

vortexes, and then suddenly fixing themselves motionless, each upon her left or right great-toe, with the other leg stretched out at an angle of ninety degrees ;—as if you had suddenly pricked into the floor, by one of their points, a pair, or rather a multitudinous cohort, of mad, restlessly jumping and clipping scissors, and so bidden them rest with open blades, and stand still, in the Devil's name! A truly notable motion ; marvellous, almost miraculous, were not the people there so used to it. Motion peculiar to the opera ; perhaps the ugliest, and surely one of the most difficult, ever taught a female creature in the world. Nature abhors it ; but art does at least admit it to border on the impossible. One little Cerito, or Taglioni the Second, that night when I was there, went bounding from the floor as if she had been made of Indian-rubber, or filled with hydrogen gas, and inclined by positive levity to bolt through the ceiling ; perhaps neither Semiramis nor Catherine the Second had bred herself so carefully.

“ Such talent and such martyrdom of training, gathered from the four winds, was now here, to do its feat and be paid for it. Regardless of expense, indeed ! The purse of Fortunatus seemed to have opened itself, and the

divine art of musical sound and rhythmic motion was welcomed with an explosion of all the magnificences which the other arts, fine and coarse, could achieve. For you are to think of some Rossini or Bellini in the rear of it, too ; to say nothing of the Stanfields, and hosts of scene-painters, machinists, engineers, enterprisers ;—fit to have taken Gibraltar, written the History of England, or reduced Ireland into industrial regiments, had they so set their minds to it !

“ Alas, and of all these notable or noticeable human talents, and excellent perseverances and energies, backed by mountains of wealth, and led by the divine art of music and rhythm, vouchsafed by Heaven to them and us, what was to be the issue here this evening ? An hour’s amusement, not amusing either, but wearisome and dreary, to a high-dizened select Populace of male and female persons, who seemed to me not much worth amusing ! Could any one have pealed into their hearts once, one true thought, and glimpse of Self-vision : ‘ High-dizened, most expensive persons, Aristocracy so called, or *Best* of the World, beware, beware what proofs you give of betterness and bestness ! ’ And then the salutary pang of conscience in reply : ‘ A select Populace,

with money in its purse, and drilled a little by the posture-maker: good Heavens! if that were what, here and everywhere in God's creation, I *am*? And a world all dying because I am, and show myself to be, and to have long been, even that? John, the carriage, the carriage: swift! Let me go home in silence, to reflection, perhaps to sackcloth and ashes! This and not amusement, would have profited those high-dizened persons.

“Amusement, at any rate, they did not get from Euterpe and Melpomene. These two Muses, sent for, regardless of expense, I could see, were but the vehicle of a kind of service which I judged to be Paphian rather. Young beauties of both sexes used their opera-glasses, you could notice, not entirely for looking at the stage. And it must be owned the light, in this explosion of all the upholsteries, and the human fine arts and coarse, was magical; and made your fair one an Armida—if you liked her better so. Nay, certain old Improper-Females (of quality), in their rouge and jewels, even these looked some *reminiscence* of enchantment; and I saw this and the other lean domestic Dandy, with icy smile on his old worn face; this and the other Marquis Singedelomme, Prince Mahogany, or the like foreign digni-

tary, tripping into the boxes of said females, grinning there awhile, with dyed moustachios, and macassar-oil graciousity, and then tripping out again;—and, in fact, I perceived that Coletti, and Cerito, and the rhythmic arts, were a mere accompaniment here.

“Wonderful to see; and sad, if you had eyes! Do but think of it. Cleopatra threw pearls into her drink in mere waste; which was reckoned foolish of her. But here had the modern aristocracy of men brought the divinest of its arts, heavenly music itself; and, piling all the upholsteries and ingenuities that other human art could do, had lighted them into a bonfire to illuminate an hour’s flirtation of Singedelomme, Mahogany, and these improper persons! Never in nature had I seen such waste before. O Coletti, you whose inborn melody, once of kindred as I judged to ‘the melodies eternal,’ might have valiantly weeded out this and the other false thing from the ways of men, and made a bit of God’s creation more melodious,—they have purchased you away from that; chained you to the wheel of Prince Mahogany’s chariot, and here you make sport for a macassar Singedelomme and his improper-females past the prime of life! Wretched spiritual nigger, Oh, if you *had* some

genius, and were not a born nigger, with mere appetite for pumpkin, should you have endured such a lot? I lament for *you* beyond all other expenses. Other expenses are light; you are the Cleopatra's pearl that should not have been flung into Mahogany's claret-cup. And Rossini, too, and Mozart and Bellini—Oh Heavens, when I think that music too is condemned to be mad and to burn herself, to this end, on such a funeral pile,—your celestial Opera-house grows dark and infernal to me! Behind its glitter stalks the shadow of Eternal Death; through it too I look not 'up into the divine eyes,' as Richter has it, 'but down into the bottomless eyesocket'—not up towards God, Heaven, and the Throne of Truth, but too truly down towards Falsity, Vacuity, and the dwelling-place of Everlasting Despair."

It was, no doubt, from considerations of a moral kind that the celebrated Swedish vocalist, Jenny Lind, was induced, at a great professional sacrifice, to relinquish the operatic stage. Mr. Sheridan Knowles, also, may be presumed to have renounced the stage, both as an author and an actor, in uniting in church communion with the Baptist denomination, three of whose ablest ministers he formerly

withstood in a controversy on the immoral tendency of the stage.*

But there is yet another testimony against the theatre and its evils, given in the most impressive manner, by an actor of no small mark and likelihood, within the last few years. We allude to Montague Stanley.† He was devoted to the stage at an early period of life, and became strongly attached to it. He was first brought into notice in Edinburgh, where he was engaged in the theatre in 1828; and from the first exhibited talents which promised to raise him to distinction in his profession. He was a man of lively and generous impulses, a close observer of nature, possessed a poetical taste and temperament, cultivated a talent for drawing, and painted with growing

* Now that he is a member of the denomination, three among the ablest of whose ministers he withstood, and in place of his old avocations is found delivering lectures on rhetoric at Stepney Baptist College, "chiefly with a view to secure an easy and elegant style of delivery on the part of the students now training in that institution," possibly he looks back upon the contest we have referred to, with feelings different from those with which he entered into it, and with views not precisely similar to those he then so forcibly enunciated.—*Devonport Independent*.

† *Memoir of Montague Stanley, A.R.S.A.* By the Rev. D. T. K. Drummond.

success for the annual exhibition. All the while his popularity on the stage was increasing. After an engagement in Dublin, and another in London, in 1832-3, he returned to Edinburgh, and continued on the boards of the Theatre Royal till 1838, when he closed his histrionic career in the height of his popularity in that city. He had, some years previously, formed a marriage connection with a family of great respectability in Edinburgh, which was destined to give a new complexion to his character and life. One member of this family had gone out to India to practise medicine, and there, like many others of our countrymen, in similar circumstances, was brought to seek after the Lord, whom he had neglected in his father-land. His correspondence with the family breathed the spirit and affection of a renewed nature. Out of a large family circle, not one remained uninfluenced by his letters. Mr. Stanley alone held out resolutely, characterising the communications of his brother-in-law as the "rhapsodies of Methodism," and their writer as "righteous over much, and as assuming an air of sanctity which was both unreasonable and absurd." Still there were indications even in the vehemence of his opposition, that a work of momentous importance was beginning in the

heart of the proud player. Dimly at first, he began to discern that all was not safe betwixt him and his righteous Judge. As his spiritual perceptions cleared up, he sought refuge in a more rigid adherence to moral duties. "The works of the law became paramount—religion was not only respected, but its observances were attended to—family worship was begun in the evening, and every oath or expression of irreverence was expunged from the parts which he had to commit to memory for the stage. From tolerating, he was led to hate and condemn sin" In 1837 we find him formally resolving, by the grace of God, "to lead a new life, and become a new creature in Christ." And we are prepared for discovering, in 1838, a struggle going on betwixt his religious principles and his profession as an actor. His biographer, the Rev. Mr. Drummond, of Edinburgh, who was also his pastor, says:—"He had for years devoted himself to the profession of his choice—one which gratified his tastes, which seemed to open an easy and pleasant path to the realizing of his ambitious hopes, and in the pursuit of which he had been eminently successful. It may be safely affirmed, that, in the theatrical profession, few indeed ever had brighter prospects than Mr. Stanley had at the period

now mentioned. But the last portion of his service in this profession was anything but happy. All was succeeding with him as regarded worldly things. He had acquired the esteem and confidence of a considerable circle of friends. He was happy in his home. He was beginning to attain to something more than a local celebrity. He was considered one of the most rising in his profession. He was experiencing the intoxicating draught of popular applause. He was in the receipt of a very handsome income from his professional labours; and yet amidst all this his mind was ill at ease." In short, the felt incongruity between his Christian character, and his pursuits as an actor, became intolerable. His conscience told him that he could not hold the high and heavenly principles which had been revealed to him, together with the opinions and feelings he formerly had cherished. "He saw (says his biographer) that he could not serve God and mammon. Yet what was he to do? His livelihood, the support of his family, all depended upon his professional exertions. Was he to throw away the only means apparently within his reach of providing for them? Was he prepared to step down at once with them, from a state of comfort to one of straitened means,

perhaps of penury?" Although these sentences follow consecutively in his memoir, it is not to be supposed that Mr. Stanley, after he had become convinced of the unchristian character of the stage, hesitated for a single moment as to the duty of leaving it at all hazards; and modern religious biography exhibits no finer example of simple faith, trustful confidence, singleness of purpose, and promptitude of decision. "No sooner (says his biographer) did he, by the grace of God, discover that he was not honouring God by the course he was pursuing, than 'immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood'—he threw aside every other consideration than that of child-like submission and obedience to the Word of God, and at once resigned his situation with all its present advantages, and all its future hopes."

His Journal contains the following entries:—

"FEBRUARY 14, 1838.—Having resolved to quit the theatrical profession, as contrary to the will of God, I this evening told Mr. —, and decided upon a step which I feel assured the Almighty will bless, since it is for his honour and glory that I take it; trusting entirely in God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

"APRIL, 28.—Last night of my dramatic career; and now thanks be to the Lord who

hath called me from darkness to light. *I am emancipated from a most ungodly profession.* May the Lord bless and prosper me in my new one."

We cannot help lingering with a mournful interest on the subsequent career of this noble-minded man, which, although not bearing immediately on the subject in hand, furnishes some traits of character which give additional weight to his testimony against the stage, and enhance the magnanimity of his self-sacrifice. Montague Stanley had counted the cost, and taken up the cross, soberly, deliberately, and prayerfully. He had cheerfully surrendered his growing emoluments, and what is dearer to the player, his cherished popularity; and now we find him embarked on the wide sea of life, and buffeting its billows with a brave heart. His fine talents were in the first instance devoted to teaching drawing, elocution, fencing, and the flute, whilst his leisure was given to the cultivation of landscape painting, with a view to its becoming his ultimate profession; and it is remarked as singularly indicative of his gifted mind that he taught all these branches *well*. His success enabled him ere long to confine himself exclusively to his favourite pursuit as an artist, and a teacher of

drawing and painting. Whilst giving lessons in elocution, several persons became his pupils who were avowedly preparing themselves for the theatrical profession. We are told that in such cases he never faltered in his duty. He entreated them to re-consider their resolution. He spoke to them as a Christian man upon the principles involved in their choice, and he spoke to them from experience as to the actual state of things in the theatrical profession. He was successful in dissuading no fewer than five of his pupils from their purpose of entering upon that profession. His love of art induced him to spend his first autumnal holidays in painting from nature amongst the old oaks of Cadzow Forest, at Hamilton, "living in the little cottage of the keeper of the Duke's white cattle." "While he laboured with his pencil during the day, he did not neglect his higher calling as a man of God. Mr. Stanley formed a little church in the house; and every morning and evening did he gather the inmates together, and the Bible was read, and prayer offered up, and the voice of praise was heard ascending from the little band." And the savour of his faithful warnings, his fervent prayers, and his humble walk, was long after cherished in that rural abode. But his close application and laborious

efforts, mental and physical, proved too much for his constitution. He removed to the island of Bute, where symptoms of consumption were developed; and died there in May, 1844. We have seen what he sacrificed for conscience' sake, and what was the manner of his life. We add a single quotation more to illustrate the peace of his death. On the last Sabbath that he spent on earth, in his cottage at Ascog, after listening to some passages of the Word of God, upon which his soul fed continually—"Stretched upon his bed, Montague watched the people as they passed along the road on their way to the sanctuary—the house of prayer—where he was never again to worship with them but in spirit, where his voice had been so often heard leading the psalm of praise and thanksgiving, and where he had, Sabbath after Sabbath, spoken to the school children of a Saviour and a God of love. The chapel-bell ceased, and no sound was heard but the ripple of the tide upon the beach, and the carolling of the birds, but these were sounds in harmony with his feelings. Everything in the vegetable world was awaking into life, and nature, after her winter sleep, again sprang forth with renewed vigour and the activity of health; but our dear brother, before the summer of his life had closed, was withering away

That his mind was at this time occupied in dwelling upon the glories that were yet to be revealed to him, I have no doubt; for, when the Rev. Mr. Monteith called at the close of the morning service, and as he entered, said, ‘Well, after all, this is certainly a beautiful world we live in,’ Montague placed his finger on his eye and on his ear, and gazed expressively towards heaven. Mr. Monteith interpreted the action, and repeated, ‘Eye hath not seen,’ &c., whereon Montague smiled, and nodded assent.” Again, “Do you remember”—he wrote, on a subsequent day, when he could scarcely articulate, in conversation with a brother-in-law—and what a contrast betwixt the enjoyments to which his recollections now turned, and those which he had once derived from the plaudits of the gay and giddy throng—“do you remember the Sabbath-days we used to pass at Ascog church, and the sweet counsel we took together at the school?”

An anecdote is quoted by Mr. James, of a noted comedian named Shuter, in Mr. Whitfield’s time, showing the unhappy life he led, from the consciousness of following “an ungodly profession,” without the grace which enabled Montague Stanley to emancipate himself from its thralldom. Shuter had trembled under the

preaching of Whitfield, while warning his hearers of a judgment to come. He also occasionally attended the ministrations of Mr. Kinsman, and sometimes called upon him in London. After a period of separation, they met at Plymouth, where Mr. Kinsman was now settled. "I am just returned from London," said he, "where I have preached so often, and to such large auditories, and have been so indisposed, that Dr. Fothergill advised my immediate return to the country for change of air." "And I," said Shuter, "have been acting Sir John Falstaff so often, that I thought I should have died, and the physicians advised me to come into the country for the benefit of the air. Had *you* died, it would have been in serving the best of masters; but had I, it would have been in the service of the devil. O! Sir, do you think I shall ever be called again? I certainly was once; and if Mr. Whitfield had let me come to the Lord's table with him, I never should have gone back again. But the caresses of the great are exceedingly ensnaring. My Lord E—— sent for me to-day, and I was glad I could not go. Poor things! they are unhappy, and they want Shuter to make them laugh. But, O! Sir, such a life as yours. As soon as I leave you,

I shall be King Richard. This is what they call a good play, as good as some sermons. I acknowledge there are some striking and moral things in it; but, after it, I shall come in again with my farce of 'A Dish of all Sorts,' and knock all that on the head. Fine reformers we!" A Methodist minister, now in India, sometime since published an account of his intercourse with Mr. Power the comedian, during their voyage to New York in company. On their parting, Mr. Power shook his companion by the hand, expressing, with much feeling, and in terms not unlike poor Shuter's, his consciousness of the unhappy service in which he was engaged, as compared with that of a minister of the gospel. Power was afterwards lost in the President steamship.

In relinquishing the stage as a profession, Montague Stanley acted upon a Scriptural principle, which ought to restrain Christians from countenancing it as an amusement—"Be not *conformed* to this world; but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind." The difference between these two conditions is as wide as words can make it. The precept describes a change of heart and habit, of taste and pursuit, nothing short of an entire renewal. It admits of no intermediate state. *Conformity*

to the world's maxims and its ways, is one thing; *transformation*, after the Christian model of principle and action, is diametrically the opposite. It is a change feebly imaged by the metamorphosis of the creeping caterpillar into the winged and gilded butterfly. The line of demarcation betwixt the two descriptions of character is broad and impassable. Christianity is on one side; on the other, worldly-mindedness. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Let this test be applied to the pleasures and pursuits of Christians and men of the world. "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also." A man's character is evinced by his amusements, as well as by the choice of his friends and books. Tell me what pleasures you indulge in, and I will tell you what you are. The Scriptures, in presenting us with a testing principle for our pursuits and enjoyments, require us to go through with it. No principle is less liable to misconception. It possesses the virtue of Ithuriel's spear. The true and the false are made apparent by its touch. Apply it to the theatre. It is pre-eminently a worldly amusement. It is indeed fashionable and fascinating,—granted. It might be both, and yet be innocent, except when indulged in to excess. But, reader, it

must have been established to your conviction, by the accumulated testimonies of the preceding pages, that innocent it cannot be regarded. From the general description of its literature ; from the average character of its frequenters ; from its injurious effects upon the great proportion of those who have the misfortune to be connected with it as a profession, it has been proved that it is an immoral amusement. Its boasted morality is not that of the Word of God, which owns no other school of virtue, and proclaims all efforts to supplement its lessons as gratuitous and presumptuous. "The law of the Lord is perfect." And when the holy Oracles declare that "the lips of the righteous shall feed many," it is no breach of charity to aver that stage-players are not included amongst the teachers, nor the frequenters of the theatre amongst the taught. The morals of the stage are lower even than those of the world ; and general society, irrespective altogether of that portion of it making a profession of religion, repudiates alike its teachers and its lessons. Is the theatre, then, a place which a Christian can consistently enter, far less frequent, for the purpose of amusement ? If in the expression "the world," the inspired writer included frivolous and corrupting amusements,

surely amongst these the theatre stands in the foremost rank ; and to it, therefore, the precept applies with peculiar emphasis, “ Be not conformed to the world.” “ The controversy would be short indeed,” Mr. Wilberforce* has remarked on this subject, “ if the question were to be tried by the criterion of love to the Supreme Being. If there were anything of that sensibility for the honour of God, and of that zeal in His service which we show in behalf of our earthly friends, or of our political connections, should we seek our pleasure in that place which the debauchee, inflamed with wine, or bent on the gratification of other licentious appetites, finds most congenial to his state and temper of mind? In that place where when moral principles are inculcated, they are not such as a Christian ought to cherish in his bosom, but such as it must be his daily endeavour to extirpate—not those which Scripture warrants, but those which it condemns as false and spurious, where, surely, if a Christian shall trust himself at all, it would be requisite for him to prepare himself with a double portion of watchfulness and seriousness of mind, instead of selecting it as the place in which he

* *Practical View of Christianity.*

may throw off his guard, and unbend without danger !”

The theatre is a favourite resort of young men. Dear young brother, these pages have been written, and these authorities of the wise and good adduced, in the earnest hope of dissuading you from ever crossing its threshold. “ Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” Resist the first temptation. No other amusement has been so fertile in corrupted manners, and ruined reputations, as this hot-bed of vice and folly. Doubtless, many escape the worst effects of the moral pollution of a play-house, as they might the physical contagion of a pest-house ; but no one has a right to calculate on this immunity, and rashly venture in where others are falling victims to the poisoned atmosphere of the place. “ You must eschew, if you would be safe, that accursed casuistry which should dispose you to inquire how near you might go to what is dangerous, and adopt that which will teach you rather to consider at how great a distance you can keep yourselves from what is sinful. Instead of tampering with temptation, and running with open eyes into scenes of peril, deeply conscious of the corruption and manifold deceitfulness of your hearts, you will do well oft to send up to the throne of the

Eternal, the earnest ejaculation, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity."*

Do you make a profession of Christianity, and have you been to the theatre? You are a member of a Christian congregation; how should you feel towards your pastor had you seen him witnessing, along with you, a frivolous comedy or an indecent ballet? If you are a Sabbath-school teacher, how should you like to meet your scholars there? Yet, if *you* can attend the theatre consistently with your religious profession, why may not *they* do the same? But it is a light thing to be tried by man's judgment. The question must be determined at a higher tribunal, and it will be well if it is studied, ere it be too late, in the light of eternity. A lady was expatiating to the pious Hervey on the pleasures of the play. "What are those pleasures?" he inquired. "They are three," replied the lady—"pleasure before the play, pleasure during the play, and pleasure after the play." "You have omitted another pleasure," rejoined Hervey. "What is that, Sir?" asked the lady eagerly. "The pleasure which it will afford you on a death-bed." Who does

* *Discourse on Amusements of Youth.* By Dr. W. Symington.

not shudder at the thought of being suddenly summoned from the voluptuous and impure enjoyments of the theatre, into the presence of the Judge of all the earth? Who amidst its giddy and delirious pleasures, or after they are over, dare invoke the Divine blessing upon them?

They tell us of a valley in a distant island, teeming with vegetable forms of tropical beauty, where an invisible vapour is ever suspended, which the unsuspecting traveller inhales and perishes; and a scene which, to the observer, is superficially one of attractive loveliness, is strewn below with dead men's bones. Such a scene of seductive and perilous fascination is the stage. The wrecks of youthful purity and promise are there, and the gaunt spectres of blighted characters, and the despairing cry of disappointed hopes. Young brother, you may venture to the theatre, and perhaps remain scatheless. It is a hard battle where none escapes. But your true safety is in flight. "Escape for thy life; tarry not in all the plain; but flee unto the mountain." As young men form the most numerous class of supporters of the stage, so the moral desolation which it has wrought in society has always fallen principally and primarily upon them; and all experience

and observation warrant us in predicating of a large proportion of the youthful votaries of the play, that their doom is as certainly sealed, as if it were written in the language which the poet saw inscribed upon the gloomy portals of the “Inferno”—

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!”





A P P E N D I X.



THE CHEAP THEATRES.

DR. GRISCOM of New York, in a report made a few years ago on the sources of vice and crime in that city, says, "Among the causes of vicious excitement in our city, none appear to be so powerful in their nature as theatrical amusements. The number of boys and young men who have become determined thieves, in order to obtain the means of introduction to the theatres and circuses, would appall the feelings of every virtuous mind, could the whole truth be laid before them."

The Hon. and Rev. H. Montagu Villiers, in a discourse delivered before the Young Men's Christian Association of London, in 1851, says, "I had occasion to investigate the books of a Penitentiary last year, and I was told, without any qualification, that the majority of the inmates, who were seeking to recover their characters in these places, were first seduced from the paths of virtue at theatres, races, or tea-gardens."

Mr. M'Callum, the respectable Governor of the Glasgow House of Refuge for Boys, has obligingly furnished the writer with the following notes, as average specimens of

the cases of youthful delinquents placed under his charge, with a view to their reformation:—

Jan. 28, 1852.—W. D., aged eleven years, sent here on the 28th of January, by Baillie Mitchell, charged with theft. Was born in Ireland, and came to this country with his father six years ago. Began to go wrong three years ago, by associating with the boys who came about the *shows*. In his own words, “Stole whatever I could lay my hands upon.” Had seen nothing but wickedness, as far back as he can remember, about these *shows*.

Feb. 6, 1852.—W. G., aged fourteen years, sent here on the 6th inst., by Baillie M'Gregor, charged with theft. Was born in Liverpool. Parents are both living in Southampton. Ran away from his parents and came to Glasgow. Has been at sea. Fell in with a gang of bad boys, who reside about Cheapside Street, technically known among thieves as the Barracks. With them he commenced his depredations by stealing iron, copper, lead, rags, ropes, &c., which they sold in rag shops, and spent the money in *theatres* and *shows*, which they regularly attended. Was eleven times in the different police-offices, and twice in Bridewell; once for sixty days, and another time for six weeks.

Feb. 20, 1852.—W. M'G., aged fourteen years, sent here on the 20th of February, by Baillie Stewart, charged with theft. Was born in Alloa, and came to Glasgow five years ago. Father and mother both living. Was some time employed in a rope-work, where he got 3s. a-week; left that about a year ago, and began to go astray; first, by associating with bad boys, and then took to stealing. First stole two short-gowns from step-mother, which

he sold for 10*d.*, and spent sixpence of it in the *shows*, and the rest in sweetmeats. Was fond of the *shows* and *theatres*, and constantly stole to get to them. Was greatly addicted to lying, swearing, stealing, and Sabbath-breaking.

May 7, 1852.—D. G., aged thirteen years, recommended here by Baillie Gourlay, and taken up on the 7th of May, by his mother, a widow. Was led astray about two years ago; first, by bad companions. Began by stealing a shilling from his mother, which he spent in sweetmeats and the *shows*. His *father* took him there the *first* time, and afterwards *he stole regularly to get to them*.

May 7, 1852.—J. B., aged twelve years, sent here on the 7th of May, by Baillie Bogle, accused of theft. Was born in Ireland, and came to this country when a child. Was four years in the Industrial School; learned to read and write there, and was at the tailoring trade. Was led astray by bad boys, who were sent from the police-office. First learned to steal pocket handkerchiefs, and on a Sabbath evening picked sometimes nine, which they sold in the Wynds to the wee pawns, and got from 3*d.* to 1*s.* for each of them. This money was spent at the *shows* and *theatres*, and on sweetmeats, of which he was very fond.

Mr. M'Callum adds, "I took *fifty* boys, not selected, but in the order of their admission, and no fewer than *forty* of them, either *began*, or were *confirmed* in their course of crime, by means of the *theatres* and *shows*. These places are the most fruitful sources of juvenile delinquency and immorality in the city. They pander to the passions, and supply vicious excitement, in the shape of such plays as "The Pirates," "Jack Sheppard," &c., which have a most demoralizing effect on the youthful community. I

have seen two or three hundred young persons, from ten to twenty years of age, coming out of an evening from one of these places, upwards of three-fourths of whom stole to get there ! The shows and theatres annually enlist a large staff of fresh recruits to supply the places of those whom the vigilance of the police has lodged in the jail, or the judge's sentence expelled the country. In my opinion (and I had some experience during eight years in the City Mission), until the shows, theatres, saloons, &c., are swept away, the Sabbath-school teacher's labour will be greatly retarded, and his sanguine hopes often doomed to the bitterest disappointment. All who have the best interests, temporal and spiritual, of the youth of our city at heart, ought to make a combined and irresistible effort to abolish these nuisances without delay."



ADDITIONAL TESTIMONIES AGAINST THE STAGE.

MISS JOANNA BAILLIE, though she does not absolutely condemn the stage, is constrained, as a moralist, to protest against fashionable comedy. "The moral tendency of it," she observes, "is very faulty ; that mockery of age and domestic authority, so constantly held forth, has a very bad effect on the younger part of an audience ; and that continual lying and deceit in the first characters of the piece, which is necessary for conducting the plot, has a most pernicious one."

The Hon. and Rev. H. M. Villiers says—"An indivi-

dual can know but little of life in London, who is not aware that the neighbourhood of the theatre is, of all others, the most prolific in sensuality and vice. That neighbourhood cannot be worse naturally. It can only be that it is more suited for that particular trade, owing to the customers being such as are the commonest frequenters of the theatre."

During the progress of the most ferocious revolution which ever insulted the face of heaven, theatres, in Paris alone, multiplied from six to twenty-five. Now, one of two conclusions follows from this: either the spirit of the times produced the institutions, or the institutions cherished the spirit of the times; and this would certainly go to prove, that they are either the parents of vice or the offspring of it.

In one of the essays published by the Jansenists of the Port Royal in France, is the following remark:—"It is so true that plays are almost always a representation of vicious passions, that the most part of Christian virtues are incapable of appearing upon the stage. It would be strange to see a modest and silent religious person represented."

Dr. Witherspoon observes—"Whatever debate there be, whether good men may attend the theatre, there can be no question at all, that no openly vicious man is an enemy to it, and that far the greatest part of them do passionately love it." As to the lawfulness of Christians frequenting the theatre, the same writer says—"For many ages there was no debate upon it at all. There were players; but they did not pretend to be Christians themselves, and they had neither countenance nor support

from any who did. Whereas now there are abundance of advocates for the lawfulness, some for the usefulness, of plays,—not that the stage is become more pure, but that Christians are become less so, and have lowered the standard or measure requisite to attain and preserve that character.”

The Rev. William Law remarked, that, “If a person were to make a collection of all the wicked, blasphemous, lewd, impudent, detestable things that are said in the playhouse only in one season, it would appear to be such a mass of sin, as would sufficiently justify any one in saying, that the profession of players is the most wicked and detestable in the world. All people, therefore, who ever enter their house, or contribute the smallest mite towards it, must look upon themselves as having been so far friends to the most powerful instrument of debauchery, and to be guilty of contributing to a bold, open, and public exercise of impudence, impurity, and profaneness.” “Be not partaker of other men’s sins.”

Sir Andrew Agnew, on first going to London, was accompanied by his elder boys, of the ages of twelve and thirteen; and on their account he once more made an experiment which he had before tried for himself. He thought (says Dr. Thomas M’Crie, his biographer), that they would naturally wish to see and judge for themselves of such places of amusement as Astley’s, Sadler’s Wells, and Covent Garden; and he once accompanied them to the latter theatre. One visit was, however, sufficient. He found, as an eminent Christian once said, that “either he was changed, or all the world was changed.” Everything appeared in a new light to him; and he remarked, “I do

not understand how it was, that when I formerly attended such things, they did not strike me in the same way. I must surely have been more occupied with the party that I went with, than with the proceedings on the stage; for, do you know that actually the main thing in the play I witnessed with my boys was just a low piece of intrigue, most revolting to good taste; and the attempt at concealment of vice, with the discovery made at last, constituted the whole interest of the piece; while any allusion to morality or better feelings, seemed so out of place as only to make it worse. Of the characters that frequent such places," he continued, "I was aware, and felt it to be an argument against them; but I had certainly forgot the depraved and revolting nature of the performances themselves. I shall never go again myself, and far less take my children to such places."

Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his *Life of Savage*, speaks of the condition of an actor, as that which makes almost "every man, for whatever reason, contemptuous, insolent, petulant, selfish, and brutal."

A modern writer observes:—"I am as sensible as any man of the wonderful talents of that poet, Shakspeare! For force of language, for exhaustless invention, for an insight into human nature, for a power to touch and rend the heart, he is unequalled, and stands amongst dramatists as a diamond among pearls; but while I honour his intellectual capacities, I must deeply lament their miserable abuse. So far from having a moral end before him, he has frequently its opposite, and seems indifferent to moral results. His licentious witticisms, his corrupt allusions, many times repeated, render many parts of his works,

in a moral light, the objects of indignation and disgust."

Sir John Hawkins, in his *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson*, observes:—"Although it is said of plays, that they teach morality, and of the stage, that it is the mirror of human life; these assertions are mere declamation, and have no foundation in truth or experience. On the contrary, a playhouse, and the regions about it, are the very hot-beds of vice. How else comes it to pass, that no sooner is a playhouse opened in any part of the kingdom, than it becomes surrounded by a host of brothels? Of this truth the neighbourhood of ——— has had experience: one parish alone, adjacent thereto, having, to my knowledge, expended the sum of £1300 in prosecutions for the purpose of removing those inhabitants, whom, for the instruction in the science of human life, the playhouse had drawn together."

Archbishop Tillotson characterized playhouses as "devil's chapels," and "schools and nurseries of lewdness and vice."

It is recorded of Sir Matthew Hale, that "he was an extraordinary proficient at school, and for some time at Oxford; but the stage players coming thither, he was so much corrupted by seeing plays, that he almost wholly forsook his studies. By this he not only lost much time, but found that his head was thereby filled with vain images of things; and being afterwards sensible of the mischief of this, he resolved, upon his coming to London, never to see a play again, to which resolution he constantly adhered."

The American Congress, soon after the Declaration of Independence, passed the following motion:—

“Whereas, true religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness ;

“Resolved, that it be, and hereby is, earnestly recommended by the several States, to take the most effectual measures for the encouragement thereof, and for the suppressing of *theatrical entertainments*, horse-racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners.”



THE STAGE ‘HOLDING THE MIRROR UP TO NATURE.’

(From *The Races—The Theatre*, by Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, United States.)

It is too true. There is scarcely an evil incident to human life, which may not be fully learned at the theatre. Here flourishes every variety of wit—ridicule of sacred things, burlesques of religion, and licentious *double-entendres*. Nowhere can so much of this lore be learned, in so short a time, as at the theatre. There one learns how pleasant a thing is vice ; amours are consecrated ; license is prospered ; and the young come away alive to the glorious liberty of conquest and lust. But the stage is not the only place about the drama where human nature is learned. In the boxes, the young may make the acquaintance of those who abhor home and domestic quiet ; of those who glory in profusion and obtrusive display ; of those who expend all, and more than their earnings, upon

gay clothes and jewellery; of those who think it no harm to *borrow their money without leave* from their employer's till; of those who despise vulgar appetite, but affect polished and genteel licentiousness. Or he may go to the pit, and learn the whole round of villain-life, from masters in the art. He may sit down among thieves, swindlers, broken-down men of pleasure—the coarse, the vulgar, the debauched, the inhuman. Or, if still more of human nature is wished, he can learn yet more; for the theatre epitomizes every degree of corruption. Let the virtuous young scholar go to the gallery, and learn there, decency, modesty, and refinement, among the women who are regularly to be found there! Ah! there is no place like the theatre for learning *human nature*! A young man can gather up more experimental knowledge here in a week, than elsewhere in half a year. But I wonder that the drama should ever confess the fact; and yet more that it should lustily plead in self-defence *that theatres teach men so much of human nature*! If you would pervert the taste—go to the theatre. If you would imbibe false views—go to the theatre. If you would efface, as speedily as possible, all qualms of conscience—go to the theatre. If you would put yourself irreconcilably against the *spirit* of virtue and religion—go to the theatre. If you would be infected with each particular vice in the catalogue of depravity—go to the theatre. Let parents, who wish to make their children weary of home and quiet domestic enjoyments, take them to the theatre. If it be desirable for the young to loathe industry and didactic reading, and burn for fierce excitements, and seek them by stealth or through pilferings, if need be—then send

them to the theatre. Theatres which should exhibit nothing but the classic drama, would exhibit it to empty seats. They must be corrupt, to live; and those who attend them will be corrupted.



PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

(From *Lecture on the Stage*, by Rev. F. Close, Cheltenham.)

“Why should we not have our private theatricals? in which all that is offensive to good taste and the most refined delicacy shall be excluded, in which neither improper persons shall act, nor indelicate allusions be tolerated, or improper displays on any account be allowed?” I reply—that questioning the possibility even of this, and suspecting, if I am rightly informed, that there is generally, even here, a mingling of public and private performers which may be very dangerous to the latter; yet supposing it all possible, and indeed accomplished, I still object to these amusements. And chiefly upon this ground; so favourable an exhibition of the Drama is calculated to create and cherish a taste and an inclination for the art, especially in the minds of the young, many of whom will be allowed by their parents to attend such performances who would not have been suffered to enter a play-house! Hence the private amateur stage becomes the forerunner of more public and objectionable exhibitions. For it is not in human nature to suppose, that an appetite for theatrical amusements being once created, the occasional

and meagre performances of amateurs will satisfy it. The transition from the one to the other, in most cases, will be found natural, easy, and almost certain—just as when children have consumed the apple they eat the peel! The same principle operates in most things. I remember that when the Scottish novels appeared, hundreds read them who would never have dipped into the common trash of novels; and I was informed at the time by several booksellers, that, so far from a purer taste being generated by that very superior class of works of fiction, an appetite for desultory and noxious reading was created, and, when the better ones were devoured, recourse was had to all the garbage of the circulating library, and an actual impulse was given to novel reading. Thus I greatly fear it will be with the purified Stage of the Amateurs. They themselves will not contribute directly to the corruption of the stage; but they will create and foster a theatrical taste, they will be the means of tempting many first in a less criminal and then in a more criminal manner, until those who first imbibed the pleasures of the Drama at the hands of the amateur, will be found night after night in the crowded avenues and abominable purlieus of the metropolitan theatres. And since we have proved what these are, we hesitate not to condemn the amusements which naturally lead to them. If we would not have the pollution and abomination of the one, we must take care how we entrap the young in the fascinating meshes of the other! Again we say, even innocent amusements, supposing them to be so, are bought too dearly if they occasion, even remotely, such enormous evils.

THE OLD ACTOR.

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

Aloft the rustling curtain flew
That gave the mimic scene to view,
How gaudy was the suit he wore,
His cheeks with red how plastered o'er !

Poor veteran ! that in life's late day,
With tottering step and locks of gray,
Essayest each trick of antic glee ;
Oh ! my heart bleeds at sight of thee.

A laugh of triumph ! and so near
The closing act and humble bier ;
This thy ambition ! this thy pride !
Far better thou hadst earlier died.

Though memory long has owned decay,
And dim the intellectual ray,
Thou toil'st from many an idle page,
To cram the feeble brain of age.

A tear creeps down his cheeks—with pain
His limbs the wasted form sustain ;
Ay—weep ! no thought thy tears are worth,
So the pit shakes with boisterous mirth.

Dead in his chair the old man lay,
His colour had not passed away ;
Clay-cold the ruddy cheeks declare
What hideous mockery lingers there.

Yes ! there the counterfeited hue
Unfolds with moral truth to view,
How false his every mimic part,
His life, his labours, and his art.



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